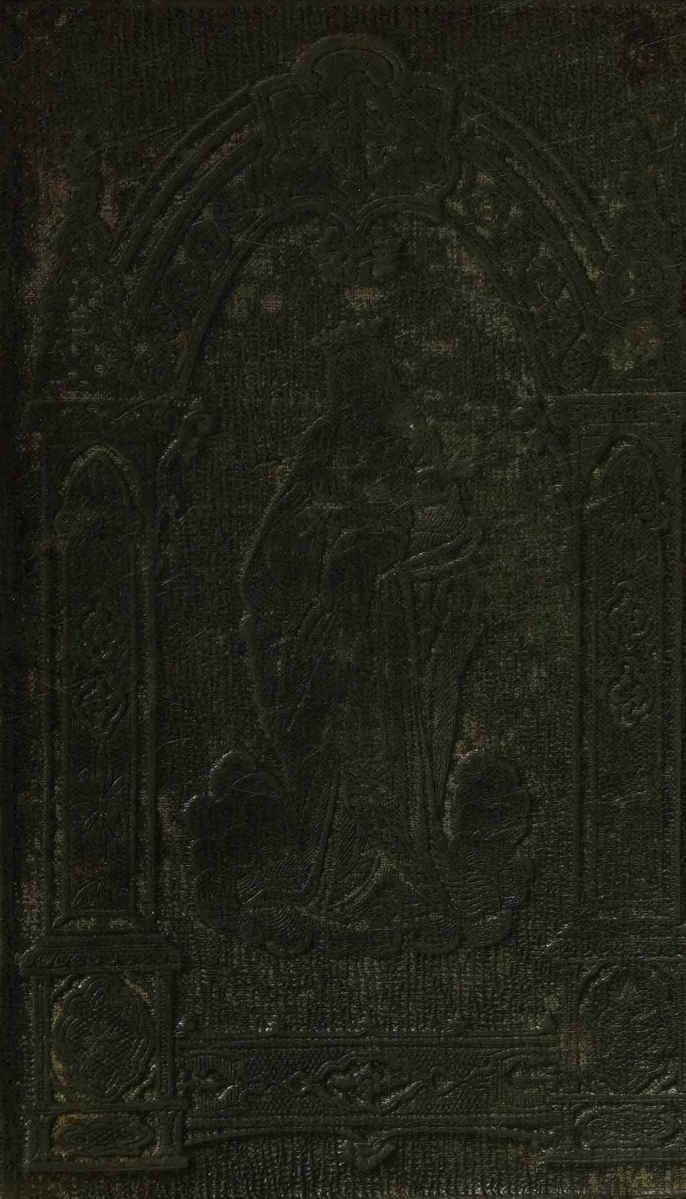

THE

ELEVATION

OF

THE SOUL TO GOD,

BY MEANS OF

SPIRITUAL CONSIDERATIONS

AND

AFFECTIONS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF L'ABBÉ TARAULT.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

NEW YORK:
EDWARD DUNIGAN & BROTHER,
151 FULTON-STREET.

1852.

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PREFACE.

"The Elevation of the Soul to God by Means of Spiritual Considerations and Affections," was published in French, some years ago, by a gentleman not less esteemed for his learning and eloquence, than for his piety and zeal in acquitting himself of the laborious functions annexed to the Ecclesiastic state, which he possessed.

The Author's intention, as he informs us in the Preface of his work, was, according to the plan recommended by the most able masters of a Spiritual life, to inculcate to the Faithful, through the two great channels of Reading and Meditation, the strongest sense he could, of the important truths of Christianity. And being sensible, from long experience, of the sublime sentiments which naturally arise from a due consideration of these truths, he chose to prefix to his work the title, which it bears of "The Elevation of the Soul to God." For the Soul being once convinced of the noble end to which it is destined by the grace of Redemption, rises above all earthly objects, and settles its whole affections on that supreme and eternal good, which alone can satisfy its desires, and allay its thirst of happiness. His plan is simple and easy. He first proposes some great truth for the matter of a spiritual Lesson, and immediately after sets forth the same in a

different manner by way of Meditation. By the mind's musing and reflecting attentively on the subject, which had been presented to it in reading, the heart is more strongly impressed with the feelings and affections which flow from a thorough conviction of the important truths made known to us in the Christian Religion.

The Translator, in offering this work to the Public, has ventured to prefix to each Lesson a text of Scripture suited to the subject; judging, that it would still add weight to the genuine sentiments of the Author. As his view in attempting this translation is not to seek applause, but to promote the cause of piety, whatever inaccuracies may be observed in it, he hopes will on that account meet with the indulgence of the benevolent reader.

THE

ELEVATION

OF

THE SOUL TO GOD.

FIRST LESSON.

ON THE SERVICE OF GOD.

Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt serve him only.—Deut. vi. 13.

A MOST solid and comfortable reflection, it is for us to remember, that in serving God, we serve at once the greatest and the best of masters; a reflection, which should engage us to serve him with an inviolable fidelity and a holy joy.

Men of the world serve, and esteem themselves happy in serving the great and mighty Lords of the earth. Kingdoms have their kings, and empires their sovereigns; and the service of these potentates is thought to carry with it an appearance of grandeur and magnificence, which may awe the vulgar crowd, and dazzle the eyes of their weak admirers. But what are these Monarchs in themselves? Do the Great make their own personal greatness? What are the rich, when stripped of their earthly treasures and opulence? and if Kings themselves, those mighty representatives of the divine majesty upon earth, were divested of their outward show and glittering apparel, what would they oftentimes be, but a compound of the greatest weaknesses, which in spite of their apparent magnificence, would disclose themselves to all who converse with them? No; there is truly but one great Master in the universe; one alone, who on his own account is

worthy to be Lord, and capable of bearing and supporting the greatness of that name. All others are weak, deficient, and imperfect: Oftentimes are dictated to by others, and though they acknowledge no Sovereign over them on earth, they must own themselves at least subject to one in heaven, who by his supreme power rules and governs them through every period of their existence.

God is the sovereign Master, to whom we have the honour, and at the same time the obligation of devoting our services. We were only placed on earth for this intent, and the moment God created us, he stamped on our very being, and engraved in our souls these important words, *The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve.*—Matth. iv. 10. From the first moment, therefore, of our existence, God as it were sealed us with his own seal, and consecrated us to his glory. This indispensable obligation has grown up in us, as we advanced in age; it is as essential to us as our very being, as intimate as our life, as ancient as our creation.

But beside this necessary bond of subjection, which we brought with us into the world at our birth, we contracted a new obligation on the happy day of our baptism, when, by the promises which were made in our name, we engaged in his holy service, and these promises we ratified afterwards by our own free choice, when we arrived at the years of discretion. From that moment then we were anew devoted to God, and thenceforward God could say to each of us, in a more special manner than ever, "Thou art mine." No title which we bear, from that period, stands in competition with that of servants of God: No duty incumbent on us demands equal fidelity, submission, and respect. Happy engagement, which thus binds us irrevocably to the Supreme Being, and glorious quality of God's servants, which raises us above the level of this world and ourselves! This noble prerogative must be the soul of all our thoughts, the first mover of all our actions, the universal rule of our conduct; and, being

once so convinced of its superior excellence, we shall ever keep it fixed immoveably before our eyes, ever riveted in our hearts, we shall allow it its due precedency before all other things, we shall square all by its rules and maxims, and make every other interest and concern subservient to it.

Such were the sentiments of the Prophet Jonas, when he embarked for the port of Tharsis in Cilicia. Being unknown to the crew, the pilot asked him, who he was? of what profession? from whence he came? and whither he was bound? I am a Hebrew, a Servant of *the Lord the God of heaven*, (Jon. i. 9.) replied Jonas, and my business is to *fear* him. Remarkable words, cries out a certain holy Father. Four questions are put to Jonas, and Jonas makes but one reply; but by this simple reply he satisfies the whole. *I am a Hebrew, I fear the Lord the God of heaven;* as if he had said, my whole profession, all my qualifications my titles, and endowments, are all comprised in these short words, *I fear the Lord.* Noble sentiments, which suit well the character of a Christian, who knows the indispensable obligation he lies under of serving God, and the greatness of the glory which accrues from his service. Servant of God is my name and surname, my family title, and my whole inheritance. I live not in the world but for this. Let others assume to themselves great titles, and glory in pompous names. Let the men of the world be distinguished by the appellations of Great, Rich, Powerful; let Monarchs divide among themselves the titles of Hero, Conqueror, Subduer; I envy not their honours; all my dignities and preferments consist in this: Servant of God. If others daily invent, and pursue eagerly the schemes, which they form to promote their temporal advancement, to flatter their ambition, and increase their fortunes, my only glory is to serve God, and my whole ambition to serve him well.

Such is the greatness of soul to which the service of God raises us, and the nobleness of sentiments with which it inspires us, in whatever state we be. This

exalted language, and these sublime feelings, are compatible with every station which God allots to his servants. If they are of the lowest and meanest condition among men, they can yet all aspire to his glory, and by their humble dependence on God, consecrate and ennoble the tribute itself of their dependence, as the service of God sanctifies, enhances and dignifies every action done for his sake.

A Christian may be subject to Superiors in the world, as his particular state demands of him : but it is in compliance with the will of God that he is subject to such authority. A good father caresses his children; he spends his care and attention on them : But remembering that he only holds the place of God, and derives his authority from him, he will study the will and pleasure of God in all things, and make it his first and essential duty to imprint the fear of God in the minds of his tender offspring. A good son obeys his parent, but acknowledging in his earthly father the eternal Father of heaven and earth, he obeys for the sake of him, to whom he remembers he is first of all indebted for his being. A good wife submits to her husband, she honours his person and respects his commands ; because she sees in him an emblem of the heavenly Bridegroom, who is wedded to her soul. A good servant complies with the will of his master, as duty requires ; because he knows, that the invisible Master of the universe, whom he serves, speaks to him by his visible representative on earth ; and it is the consideration of this revealed truth, joined to the prospect of a future reward in heaven, which encourages him to bear with cheerfulness the hardships attending his service. Subjects submit to their Sovereign in like manner ; whilst they are serving men here upon earth, they remember that their lawful obedience can, and, they hope, will be recompensed in heaven hereafter, where they trust to reign one day in glory, with the King of kings himself. Such are the noble dispositions, such the comfortable reflections, such the glorious sentiments of a Christian soul. If we did but

well know the Master, whom we serve in serving God, how should we serve him? how should we esteem the honour of serving him? No tongue would have sufficient language to express the greatness of our happiness, no heart could conceive sufficient feelings of gratitude for being admitted to his service, no life would be long enough to be spent entirely in this noble employ. With what care, what fidelity, what zeal, what eagerness, what ardour should we devote our services to him? A watchful care in studying his adorable will, and inviolable fidelity in accomplishing it the moment it is make known to us; a zeal that would interest itself in all things relating to his glory; an eagerness that would even prevent, if posssible, his sacred desires; an ardour and courage in surmounting all difficulties, in vanquishing all obstacles, and sacrificing all personal concerns to the fulfilling of his blessed will.

But have we thus served God? or instead of this care, this fidelity, this zeal, this eagerness, this ardour, this noble generosity, what have we ever discovered but sloth, inconstancy, negligence, tepidity, and disgust? Shame and confusion should sit on our countenances, for the dishonour we have done to his service by such a conduct.

O my God, how bountiful a master art thou? How unworthily are we called thy servants?

The great of the world choose to be served by honourable vassals, and God will only be served by Saints. On this score, can we call ourselves his servants? Weak, unfaithful creatures, let us give up the name or adopt the sentiments suited to the servants of God. We must at least blush for our past misconduct, and labour to repair all former neglects by rendering him more worthy services for the future.

Thou hast undoubtedly, O Lord, still many faithful servants worthy of thyself. I will not be satisfied with envying their happiness; I will labour to follow their examples.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

In serving Thee, O my God, we have the happiness of serving the best of masters: is it not then incumbent on us to serve Thee with a holy joy? And what is more capable of engaging us to serve Thee with this holy joy than the consideration of thy infinite goodness towards us? We will meditate and admire the inexplicable effusions of it, and if hitherto they have escaped our attentive consideration, a grateful remembrance of them, at least for the future, shall be deeply imprinted on our minds.

Prostrate in thy sacred presence, O my God, I conceive from this moment this ardent desire, and earnestly implore the assistance of thy grace to perpetuate for my whole life long the desire I conceive.

1st Point. Consider the goodness of God in loading us with his favours. God does not appear to be rich, but to enrich us with his treasures. What graces and favours does he pour down upon us every day? What lights illustrate our understandings? What affections warm our hearts? What helps are afforded us to draw us to sanctity? No moment of our life passes, which is not impressed with marks of the divine goodness. And after the innumerable instances of his bounty, which he discloses to us, if the source of his graces were not inexhaustible, would it in a manner be possible for him to bestow new graces upon us? But what is most remarkable, O sovereign Lord, in the dispensation of your favours is, that you overwhelm us with bounties, whilst we are rendering ourselves unworthy of them, whilst we repay your goodness with ingratitude, whilst You foresee, that we shall abuse the helps which you bestow, and turn your own graces against Yourself. The greatness of our ingratitude does not stop the liberality of Your hand, nor the baseness of our hearts prevent the effusions of your tender and all heavenly affection towards us.

2d Point. Consider the goodness of God in bearing

with our defects. How numberless are they? What an inexhaustible fund of negligences, infidelities, weaknesses, omissions, imperfections, are found in us? If we pray, with what tepidity is it? If we espouse the cause of God, with what sloth and indifference? If we pretend to serve him, with what exceptions and draw-backs from his service? He sees, he bears, he waits with impatience and expects our amendment. The world admits us into the number of its followers, whilst we are in the bloom and vigour of youth, but after awhile, when age advances on us, it rejects us from its service, and seems not to know us any longer. You, O my God, ever bountiful, never cast us off, till we ourselves force you to abandon us. We are equally dear to you at the end of our life as at the beginning; equally acceptable on the decline of our day, as at our first appearance in the world; and even at the very last hour, you mercifully receive the humble sighs, which a heart, sincerely devoted to your service, sends forth to you. O my God, how can such imperfect, such unprofitable servants be dear to you? Would you be less happy, if they were less caressed by you?

3d Point. Consider the goodness of God in pardoning our sins. It is here above all, that the goodness of God is most remarkable. Other masters may give instances of their indulgence to a certain degree, they will pardon the first and second transgressions; but repeated faults tire out their patience; they grow disgusted by seeing themselves continually ill-served; from disgust they conceive an aversion, and at last dismiss the offender from their service. You, O my God, bountiful and patient, as it were to excess, excuse, dissemble and forgive, without times and without measure, as often as we humbly return to you to crave your pardon. Perhaps in all the treasures of the divine goodness, there is nothing so much demands our admiration as this.

Our lives are usually made up of one continued series of faults, relapses, inconstancy and changes. God is unchangeable. After so many breaches of promise,

and so many failures in our pious resolutions, if we promise and resolve again, God again hears and accepts our new protestations. What excess of wretchedness generally attends our confessions, and the accusations we carry to the sacred tribunal of penance? We return almost forever with the same faults, the same infidelities, the same defects; but in God we find always the same forgiveness. If we trespass to the thousandth time, the thousandth time he receives us with goodness and tenderness, provided we return to him with sincerity; and instead of complaints and reproaches, he addresses himself to us in those comfortable words: *Go thy way in peace.*—Luke viii. 48. O my God, the more your goodness is known to me, the more sensible is the regret I feel for my sins, and my conscience redoubles the reproaches, which your fatherly tenderness forbears making me; my soul henceforward shall measure its sorrow by the rule of your forgiveness, and, if possible, equal in some manner the excess of your goodness towards me.

4th Point. But if, after our reconciliation to God, we render any small service to him, consider with what bounty he recompenses these services. Let us say then once more in raptures of joy, God is unmeasurably good in rewarding our labours. Men spend and wear themselves out in the service of the world, besides numberless sacrifices, which they are daily obliged to make to it. But what do they receive from the world in return for their services? To the greatest part of its votaries we may repeat, in the sorrow of their hearts, these words of the Holy Ghost: *You have sowed much and brought in little.*—Aggeus i. 6. How many parts of their services are unknown to the world? Of those, which are known, how few are accepted? Of those, which are acceptable, how many pass unrewarded, or at least not rewarded according to their deserts? It is not thus, O sovereign Lord, in your service. Every thing is known, every service is acceptable, and each part receives its due recompense; nothing escapes your all penetrating eye, or is rejected

by your all bountiful heart. Not only great and heroical actions will have their reward, but the most small and trivial services, the lightest sacrifices, even a cup of cold water given in your name will meet with its recompense, and remain in the possession of it during the whole length of eternity.

O my God, how little is thy goodness known? How slightly is it considered by us? Men have some faint idea of thy other perfections, of thy power, thy wisdom, thy justice, but thy goodness is not known. Thou art good, and good at all times: thou wert such from the beginning, and thou wilt be such beyond the end of ages, good unto all, making thy *Sun to rise upon the good and bad, and thy rain to fall upon the just and the unjust.*—Matt. v. 45.

Yes, God is good, and it is chiefly in his goodness that he is incomprehensible. When we reflect upon all that he has done for man, his coming down from heaven, his investing himself with our mortality, his loading himself with our miseries, his dying on a cross for us, and as if that were not equal to the extent of his goodness towards us, his continuing to renew the sacrifice of his precious body and blood on our altars every day: at the sight of these great mysteries we are struck dumb in astonishment, and it is our very astonishment which shows that we are ignorant of the goodness of God. Because to understand these mysteries it would suffice to say that God is good: this short word comprises the whole. We measure the goodness of God by our feeble comprehension; we think as men, he acts as God. The whole then is explained in this expression, God is good. But it suffices not to say, he is good; he is all goodness; he is nothing but goodness, he is goodness itself.

Such and still greater is the Master whom we serve. How great then is our happiness in being in the service of so good, so tender, so compassionate, so liberal, so generous, so perfect a master? What is our happiness, and what ought to be our feelings and sentiments? With what pleasure, joy, and satisfaction ought we to

devote ourselves to his service? How ought we to esteem his service, and bless heaven a thousand times over for the lot which is fallen to us? All the thoughts of our minds, all the affections of our hearts, all the moments of our lives, should be employed without cessation in consecrating ourselves to this service, and congratulating ourselves over and over again for the happiness we enjoy in it.

But alas! O God, is it thus we serve you? Is it with these holy desires, this eagerness, this pleasure? We serve you indeed: but in what manner? With tepidity, negligence, and indifference. Can we call this serving you? We serve you, but with unwillingness, reserve, and displeasure: we carry your yoke with difficulty and ill-will. Is this serving you as a God? We serve you with fear, with trouble, and a servile anxiety. Is this properly serving you, or rather dishonouring your service? Let us quit this spirit of terror and fruitless alarm, and conceive thoughts worthy of God and worthy of his goodness. We will fear him, but it shall be with a filial fear, which dilates the heart, not with a servile anxiety, which enslaves its affections.

We will then, O my soul, serve the Lord, and we will serve him with joy. Let this holy joy discover itself, and appear in all we do: let it diffuse itself on our countenance, let it appear in our manners, let it be made known in all our behaviour. If there be a sacrifice to be made, let us make it with generosity; if a cross is to be borne, let us bear it with cheerfulness; if a difficulty is to be undergone, let us undergo it without showing any regret, and in all things let us make the world believe, that the service of that God, whom we follow, is truly pleasant and amiable. *Serve ye the Lord with gladness.*—Psalm xcix. 2.

Conclude, from the foregoing considerations, 1st, Often to remember that maxim of Jesus Christ, that *no man can serve two masters.*—Matt. vi. 24.

2dly. If you experience any trouble or bitterness in the service of God, to reflect, that it is a just punishment for your former innumerable and heinous neglects in his service.

3dly. To recollect, that since all inanimate creatures contribute to the glory of God, according to the order of their destination, it will be an unpardonable abuse to divert your reason and free-will from the service and accomplishment of the will of God.

4thly. To think frequently of the miseries which have befallen you from your attachment to the world, and of the dreadful regret which you will feel from thence at the hour of death.

THE COLLOQUY.

My earnest wish and firm resolution from this moment, O my God, is to serve Thee all my life long. To serve thee—therein consists the whole duty and life of man; beside that, what is there important in the world? To serve Thee—the worthiest of masters, the sincerest of friends, the tenderest of parents, the most faithful spouse: but wilt thou deign to accept of our services, after we have prostituted them so long on a deceitful world? To serve Thee—but, if readmitted to thy service, to serve thee faithfully, generously, constantly; which will be our glory and happiness in this life, as it is a pledge of our eternal felicity hereafter. These, my God, are my present sentiments, these my resolutions; but a fatal experience of my former inconstancy in thy service makes me tremble for the future. Deign in thy mercy to settle the levity of my mind, and fix the instability of my heart, that I may remain immoveably attached to thy service for ever. *Amen.*

SECOND LESSON.

ON THE WORLD.

Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world.
1 John ii. 15.

The world flatters us; by flattering it deceives us; by deceiving us it works our ruin. Let us learn to know the world, and we shall cease to be attached to it.

1st. The world flatters us; thereby it ensnares and leads us astray. The world flatters our passions, and our passions corrupt the heart, which naturally is but too open to seduction. The first appearances of the world are delightful: it presents us with a variety of amusing objects to charm and entertain our senses: the eye is dazzled with the sight of them, and the heart enslaved. The world promises only joy, contentment, ease. If a young man enters into the world, every thing smiles upon him, every thing seems to enchant, and even run before his most ardent wishes. He only sees before him a path strewed with flowers; he imagines that every day, which shall dawn upon him, will be peaceful and serene; that he is entering on a career of unalterable happiness; all things seem to announce it to him.

But the world flatters us, and we love to be flattered. Our natural inclination to pleasure and dissipation prevents all consideration and reflection. We are employed in nothing, but what pleases and delights; and we dread and fly from every thing, that can give trouble and displeasure. It is a kind of intoxication or enchantment. When shall we return to ourselves? We must wait the moment of a reverse of fortune to open our eyes.

My son, said the wise man, *if sinners shall entice thee, consent not to them*,—Prov. i. 10.; if worldlings with their treacherous promises present thee the cup of honey, mistrust their offering; it is a deceitful poison, which pleases the palate, but in the end will gnaw out thy very vitals. The advice is prudent; but will advice withstand the influence of example, and can the understanding reflect, when the heart is already enslaved?

2d. In flattering us the world deceives us. The world promises a great deal, and gives little; and even the little which it gives, so far from contenting, is often a source of uneasiness and trouble. For near six thousand years worldlings have sought after happiness; but none of them have been able to find it: the world has made thousands of unhappy men, but the

world has not hitherto made one happy. Nevertheless men are still attached to it; they cannot be drawn from their error: they yet rely on the world. Ah! how deserving are they of the disappointments and troubles they experience?

The world deceives us, and what in effect do we find in the world that can be trusted? Hearts void of sensibility, parents stripped of affection, inconstant friends, hidden enemies, perishable riches, frivolous honours, deceitful pleasures; that is, apparent goods and real evils are the appendages of the world: and even when the world pours forth with a prodigal hand into our bosom its pleasures, its pretended comforts, does it not often happen, that we only experience anguish and bitterness from them? How often have parties of pleasure been changed into days of sadness? How often in the midst of shows and entertainments have weariness and disgust been felt? How often have mournful sighs interrupted the harmony of musical concerts? Such is the world.

An union was formed between two young persons, who seemed to be born to make each other happy: death suddenly snatches one of them from the tender embraces of the other, and leaves the surviving party to pass a life of melancholy and sorrow. Another had heaped up riches; he had raised himself to an important post; a reverse of fortune comes to overturn his imaginary edifice of happiness, and bury the possessor of it under its ruins. Such is the world. So many others have relied upon it, and fallen victims to its treachery, after being idolized by it.

Deceitful world, thou art now actually employed in engaging worshippers to ruin them, and in drawing new victims to thyself to sacrifice them to thy treachery; thou leadest them over meadows as it were enamelled with every enchanting flower, and thou diggest pits under their feet to swallow them up. A thousand examples have already been seen, but a thousand examples have not yet worked a change. The unhappy man, who is now enjoying thy treacherous favours,

will serve one day as a monument of thy inconstancy: forlorn, despised, rejected by the world, like the melancholy remains of a wreck, which are cast on shore after a dreadful storm, he will appear an unfortunate instance either of the downfall of human things, or of the divine vengeance. The storm is already gathering, which will swallow him up at the moment, in which he will be flattering himself to enter safe into port.

3dly. The world ruins us. Thereunto would it not suffice to flatter and deceive us? Would not that alone be affording us means of ruining ourselves, in as much as it affords us means of being perverted?

But the world ruins us, because it is an enemy and accursed of God; because men cannot at once serve two masters; because the maxims of the world are wholly opposite to those of the gospel; because the world foments, and inflames our passions; because all the objects, all the allurements, which the world presents to us, conspire against our salvation; because the examples of the world are infectious, its entertainments seducing, its discourses corrupt, its temptations innumerable, its disappointments fatal. All is danger and seduction in the world.

The world ruins us, because it blinds us by casting a veil over our eyes, which we are unwilling to have withdrawn; because it drags us along in chains, which we refuse to let loose, though we groan under the weight of them; because it subdues us by the tyranny it exercises, though we detest its oppression; because it is continually stopping us by new snares, when we think of disentangling ourselves from it. A thousand times have we complained of the world, acknowledged its vanity and nothingness, and formed the resolution of quitting it. What is the world, we said to ourselves, in those happy moments when grace worked, when conscience spoke, when God called us back and stretched out his arms to us, what is the world? And yet we are still fastened to it; we struggle in its chains, because we have not courage to make a generous effort

to set ourselves at liberty to do our duty to God and ourselves.

After all the world fleets away, and we are decaying with it, days pass, years run over our heads, the world itself is slipping from us, it will forsake us, before we quit it; perhaps we shall bewail for ever so many fruitless labours, so much lost time, the abuse of so many graces; we shall one day curse that world, which we love; but when it will be too late.

Whatever happens, let us fear the world, because it flatters us; let us mistrust the world, because it deceives us; let us detest the world, because it ruins us. Unhappy he who mistakes the world! More unhappy he, who engages in it! Infinitely unhappy the man, who exposes himself to die in it! God is our Master, the world is an usurper; God is our Father, the world a tyrant. Let us give ourselves to him, to whom we belong; should we have ever forsaken him? Let us devote to him at least the few days of life that remain; they may yet procure an eternity of happiness for us.

Happy the person, whose eyes God opens betimes on the nothingness and illusions of the world, or rather on its snares and dangers! Can he ever acknowledge the greatness of the favour? Can he ever make a sufficient return of gratitude? Ah! if he did but know the troubles he would have undergone, the dangers he would have run, the bitterness, in which he would have been plunged? But above all, when he shall be summoned to depart out of this world, what comfort will he receive at death for having renounced the world, and having consecrated the affections of his heart to God? It will have cost him some pains, some self-denials, some sacrifices; but a few years finish the course of his troubles, and eternity will be the price and recompense of them.

Take then the following advice: 1st. Forsake the world, before the world forsakes you: do at present with merit, what you will be obliged hereafter to do by necessity and without fruit.

2dly. Young persons enter too soon into the world;

aged persons are too slow in quitting it; both the one and the other will repent one day of having been engaged in it. Young persons! be not in such haste to enter into the world: ye will but too soon experience its vicissitudes and dangers. Aged persons! forsake it without delay; wait not, till the world itself discards you from its presence.

3dly. There are three sorts of persons, who look upon the world with a different eye: the sinner, the wise man, and the Christian. The sinner regards it as something lasting; the wise man as a thing which fleets away: the Christian as what is already passed. In what light does it appear to you?

Let us often consider, what feelings we shall have at the hour of death. The living man loves the world; the dying man despises it; the dead man detests it. Eternity itself will not suffice to put an end to his lamentations, and dry up his tears.

MEDITATION.

ON THE LOVE OF THE WORLD.

How blind, how unhappy, how criminal is man in loving the world? How many followers of the world, O my God, would be drawn from the world and its enchantments by these three considerations duly made? God of goodness, grant that I may so penetrate them as to be detached for ever from the world, which separates me from Thee.

1st Point. Consider how blind man is in loving the world. What do we, what can we find in the world, but emptiness, deceit and nothingness? What is there, that can attract us? Should not every thing, which the world has, rather detach, than engage our hearts? Are its promises sincere? Are its friendships lasting? Are even its favours enjoyed without danger, and without fear? Is it possible, that all we see, know, and experience in the world, should not make us comprehend its vanity? Is it possible, that

the example of so many others should not have enlightened, nor our own experience as yet have undeceived us? We see that the world only offers us apparent goods, and real evils: nevertheless we are wedded to it, we follow it, we let ourselves be enslaved by it. The deluding charm of the world must be very great, and the darkness, which it spreads, considerable to blind worldlings to such a degree, after what they have so often experienced of its changes and inconstancy.

Immortal soul, art thou then made to run after this phantom, and give into the illusion of so many lies? Whither will they at length lead thee? Consider the goods of this world: they promise much, and what do they give thee? Riches say, that they will make thee happy, and in the midst of treasures thou findest nothing but want, as St. Augustin remarks. Honours assure thee, that they bring bliss with them, and when thou art exalted to the highest honours, thou seest, that they are nothing, but empty smoke. Pleasures cry, that they alone can bestow happiness; and pleasures, so far from satisfying, are often changed into bitterness and disgust. In effect, how can the limited and perishable things of this world content a heart made for God?

Such nevertheless, O my God, is the blindness, in which men live, and from which they cannot be reclaimed. The illusion, which seduced past ages, continues still, and will seduce future times; because ages pass and vices still remain.

This blindness of men is so much more astonishing, as it shuts their eyes to all the lights of reason, to all the truths of religion, and even to the testimony of self-experience and their own feelings.

It is a blindness so much the more to be lamented, as it makes them wilfully blind themselves, and run down the precipice, after they have considered the depth.

It is a blindness most fatal in itself, and in its consequences, because men being thus blinded, there is no

excess into which they are not capable of running. God of lights, enlighten so many blind, who grope in the shades of death; permit not thy own children to be forever children of darkness. It is the world that leads them from Thee: Make them know the world, and they will soon renounce its deceits. How many years have I myself passed in this mournful and deplorable blindness? Madman that I was, I ran after a phantom, which allured me, and without perceiving it I ran to my misery and destruction.

2d Point. Consider how unhappy man is in loving the world. Do we hope ever to find solid content and true happiness in it? Where are the happy men, which the world has formed? and how many unfortunate ones, on the contrary, does it make every day? If they could make the voice of their complaints to be heard, with what groans and lamentations would the universe resound? In lieu of happiness, which they promised themselves, what have they generally experienced but troubles, disquiets, affliction of mind and heart? How many persons, after devoting themselves to, and spending their all in the service of the world, after sacrificing their interest, their rest, their liberty, their health, their conscience to the world, have met with no other reward but coldness and ingratitude? Have reaped no other fruits than fruits of bitterness? Go then, unfortunate victims of your worldly attachments; go, and expose yourselves again on that tempestuous ocean, at the certain hazard of suffering a melancholy shipwreck; go, and plunge yourself into that doleful region of darkness, to breathe its baneful and infectious air: Walk once more blindly on the brink of those horrible precipices, to fall into the deep abyss; and when you have unhappily perished in it, will the world regret your loss? What comfort will it administer to you in your distress? You would not profit by the dreadful example of so many others; you yourself shall be left as a mark of terror to those who shall come after you.

Their misfortunes will be so much the greater, as

they shall have but too justly deserved it, and can attribute it to no other cause than themselves; and it is still more dreadful, when we consider it as a source of eternal unhappiness, to which it will probably lead them. Such is the world, and such the usual lot of its unhappy followers.

Great God, how terribly dost thou revenge thyself on those who forsake thee to follow the world? What hast not thou done to make known to them their blindness, and draw them from it? What shining lights, what holy unction, what salutary remorses, what happy moments didst thou grant them? And if they had but been willing to listen to thy voice, and render themselves pliable to thy grace, their eyes would have been open to their own danger, and their hearts to a reconciliation with thee. Their repentance would then have been profitable; their tears would have been comfortable; they would have found in thee the best of Masters, the most tender of Fathers. Ah! if they had but known how sweet thy service is, how light thy yoke, with what joy would they have submitted to it? Whereas, continuing to cleave to the world, they only form fruitless regrets, they only shed tears of despair, and after tasting a momentary deceitful pleasure, they sink into an ocean of miseries.

3d Point. Consider how criminal man is in loving the world. This is the third abyss which is opened under the feet of worldlings, an abyss of crimes and sins. In effect, is it not a very great crime thus to love creatures in preference to the Creator? Is it not a trespass against the first and most essential of the commandments? What a crime thus to raise altar against altar in our hearts?

We know that we solemnly renounced the world in baptism, and that our very title of Christian comes to us by this renunciation. What a crime thus to break through our engagement?

We know that we cannot love the world without imbibing its maxims, without following its examples, without sharing of its corruption, without neglecting

our duties, without stifling remorses of conscience, without profaning our character. What a crime to expose ourselves to these disorders.

We know that the world is an enemy of God, and smitten with his anathemas, and that of consequence we cannot be friends to the world without being enemies to God. What a crime thus wilfully to incur his displeasure?

Above all, we know that it is impossible to serve two masters, and that to serve one we must necessarily abandon the other; to follow one we must renounce the other. What a crime to engage ourselves in the service of the world, as it is in some manner to renounce that of God?

What then happens? In spite of our promises and duty, we cleave to the world, we forsake God, we neglect the care of our souls, we give our heart up to seduction, our mind to error; and in consequence thereof graces are abused, conscience is resisted, remorses are stifled, duties forgotten, crimes multiplied. Behold the abyss into which the world plunges us; behold the fruits of malediction which that woful land produces. Should it not be to a Christian a strange and foreign land? In effect, what has a Christian, who is devoted to God, to have in common with the world, which disavows God?

Notwithstanding we must one day quit this perverse world; we must be torn from its deceitful allurements, from its treacherous charms; we must bid an eternal adieu to its pomps, its shows, its entertainments, let us say more properly, to its snares and illusions. What will then remain of the whole? What shall we think of ourselves, of our life, of our blindness? What shall we be able to gather from all that we have been, and all that we have enjoyed? What will become of those hopes which we vainly entertained; of those pleasures which we promised ourselves, of that length of years, of amusements, of diversions, of happy days, which were presented to us? The thread is cut, the charm

vanishes, the world and time disappears; eternity opens its boundless extent before us.

Was it for this, great God, that you placed us on earth, and is it with such sentiments that you have ordained us to appear one day before you?

Conclude from the foregoing considerations: 1st. Often to renew the engagement you made in baptism of renouncing the world.

2dly. When you meet with troubles in the world, to offer them to God in expiation for your sins.

3dly. To listen attentively to the complaints which worldlings so often make from their own experience of the world, and to profit by their example, not to share of their misfortunes.

4thly. To look upon the world as a shadow which passes, and which even is already passed. What is there lasting in the world, and why should we love what soon must end?

THE COLLOQUY.

To thee henceforeward, O my God, I will entirely devote myself. The world merits neither my heart nor my homage; it is only from ignorance of the world, that we are attached to it, and only after a sad and unfortunate experience of it that we recover from our illusion. I have found it but too much so to my misfortune. Happy yet, that thou hast deigned to open my eyes and enlighten me; otherwise, like so many others, I should have continued in my error and unhappiness. I return to thee, the God of my heart: The world shall no longer have any share in my affections. I know I must one day quit it; I will not wait till death comes to snatch it from me; from this moment I make an eternal divorce from it; my state of life may engage me in it, but my religion divides me from it; I will live as though I were not living in it. Is the life which is led in the world properly life? Can a Christian ever live in it without fear, and die in it without regret?

THIRD LESSON.

ON CONSCIENCE.

If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? but if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door?—Gen. iv. 7.

There is no knowledge so necessary for man, as the knowledge of himself, and the knowledge of himself is the knowledge of his heart and conscience; which it is the duty of all men to acquire.

The conscience of men may be in four different states. There is an upright conscience, a doubtful conscience, an erroneous conscience, and a blinded conscience. In the knowledge of these four kinds of conscience man will find the perfect knowledge of what he is, and of what he ought to be.

1st. An upright conscience is the testimony of right reason; a practical judgment, which dictates, what is allowed and what is not; it is the voice of God, which makes itself be heard in us, and speaks to us in his name; it is a ray of eternal light, which enlightens and directs us. Such is the conscience of men in general. In the sinner, conscience is a faithful mirror, which represents the blemishes of his soul to him; it is the divine register, in which an invisible hand writes our sins in proportion as we commit them; it is a secret tribunal, which God erects in the soul, to which we are cited the instant we sin, and immediately upon our citation we find an accuser standing by us, and that accuser is ourself.

God has naturally given man an upright conscience. As long as he walks by the light of that torch, he cannot stray from the paths of salvation, through which, conscience, aided by grace, directs his steps. We will explain hereafter in particular what its functions are, and what is the employ, which God has destined it to exercise in our regard.

2dly. A doubtful conscience is that, which is, as it were, hung up in balance and suspense, being uncer-

tain whether a thing be lawful or not, whether such an action be forbidden or allowed. On both sides it sees plausible reasons, which make an impression, but amongst these reasons, there is none that draws down the weight, and is sufficient to ground a determination. Thus wavering between these different and opposite reasons, it remains undetermined, and dares not make a decision for fear of being deceived, and of falling into sin.

It is never allowable to act with a doubtful conscience. We must seek for light and instruction, if we can ; or, if there be a necessity of acting out of hand, and we have neither means, nor time to consult and procure information to clear the doubt and form a conscience, after begging God to enlighten us, we must consider and examine what seems most expedient in his sight in the present circumstances, then take our determination, and proceed ; yet always reserving the intention of procuring information, and correcting the mistake afterwards, if any thing was not according to rule. This is no longer acting in doubt, as the prospect of doing what seems most expedient takes away the doubt ; we may then be deceived, but we cannot sin.

A timorous and tender conscience is that, which fears not only sin, but moreover whatever can have the least shadow, and smallest appearance of sin : happy the conscience, which is so disposed !

When the soul is disquieted, and runs into doubts without any just foundation, and reasonable motives, it sinks into the state of a scrupulous conscience ; which is a continual torment, not only to the soul itself, but often to those who direct it. Scruples may proceed from three different causes ; they may come either from God, who sends them as a trial, to which we must submit ; or from the devil, and then they are temptations, which must be mistrusted ; or from ourselves, arising from a fearful melancholy or an exceptious temper, for which we must humble ourselves. But from whatever source they proceed, the wisest

and almost only advice to be given to scrupulous persons is submission and docility, which never can be strongly enough recommended and inculcated to them. Without this they will suffer themselves, and make others suffer a species of martyrdom; even they would often be in danger of going astray, and being lost.

3dly. An erroneous conscience is that which, in point of behaviour and morals, forms a false judgment and acts in consequence of that judgment. A doubtful conscience is only a state of indetermination: this is a positive error and mistake. A conscience may be erroneous two different ways: viz. the error may be culpable or inculpable, according as our ignorance is voluntary or involuntary. It is culpable, if beforehand we had reasonable fears and doubts, and did not clear them up; if we neglected seeking instruction, when we could and ought to have done it: it is inculpable, when we have had no motive to doubt, and no means of being instructed. For example, an heir enters upon an estate, which was formerly unjustly acquired by his ancestors; but at the time of his acceptance of it he has no knowledge, no doubt concerning it being unjustly acquired; he believes it to be lawfully possessed; in this he is in an error; but the error is involuntary, and not culpable. If afterwards he should discover the flaw in his title, and should still continue possession, his conscience would then become voluntarily and criminally erroneous, contrary to good faith, and to all the dictates of an upright conscience.

4thly. When conscience continues thus, and acts in a known and voluntary error, it becomes what we call a false, blinded, and misled conscience, consequently criminal in the eyes of God. This is the most lamentable, most unhappy state, into which a soul can fall; as this kind of conscience drives the sinner headlong into all sorts of crimes, all disorders, all excesses, and becomes to him at once a source of blindness of the understanding, of hardness of heart, and finally of eternal reprobation, if he perseveres in this state.

But let us return to the upright conscience, and render ourselves docile to its heavenly directions.

An upright conscience, as the delegate of God, performs four different functions in our regard: it enlightens, it reproves, it judges, it punishes us. Let us learn to respect our conscience, or if we should not, let us learn to fear it.

1st. It enlightens us. Conscience is our first rule, our first director, and faithful guide, whom we must follow. In the business of salvation there are straight and secure paths; but there also are crooked, winding, and deceitful ones, which may lead us astray. It belongs to an upright conscience to point them out and lead us through them; it is the sacred torch which enlightens us; the secure rule which determines us; the ray of heavenly light, which shines upon us to direct our steps; it watches over our conduct; it attends to all our actions; it presides over all our thoughts, over all our affections: always clear in its penetration, always invariable in its decisions, always inflexible in its decrees; it knows not how to flatter nor to dissemble, nor to soften, nor to relent, nor to yield to times and circumstances; it never admits any gratifications and condescensions that favour nature; it always speaks the same sincere language, conformably to the spirit of the law. Happy the soul which hears its voice, which is directed by its counsels, which abides by its decisions, which never quits the path it prescribes: let us be careful not to oppose it, not to grieve it, not to act contrary to its light. Let us never have conscience against us, and we shall always have God for us. Should the whole world believe us guilty, and rise up to accuse us, if conscience reproaches us with nothing, we shall be at ease, and enjoy the inward peace of our soul; because after all we are only what we are before God, and God will only judge us according to the lights of our own conscience.

2dly. It reproves us. No; Conscience never can be an accomplice in our disorders; it disavows, it condemns them. From the moment in which we run

astray, or even are on the point of erring, conscience stands at the door of our heart, and says to us on the part of God himself, *It is not lawful for thee.*—Matth. xiv. 4. No, it is not allowed thee to do that action, to keep that connexion, to speak that word, to rest on that thought. Read not that book, which is of dangerous tendency, frequent not the company of that person whose character is suspected; expose not thyself to that occasion which will prove fatal to thee; that gain is unlawful. If in spite of these remonstrances of conscience we still proceed, it instantaneously rises up against us, and cries out, *What hast thou done?*—Kings iii. 24. Thou hast sinned; thou hast offended thy God; thou hast transgressed his law, incurred his disgrace; the object of his indignation, thou hast exposed thyself to the rigours of his justice and severest vengeance. Thus guilty David hears a voice which reproaches him with his crime, and represents it continually to his eyes, *My sin is always before me.*—Ps. lxxx. 5. Thus the murderer Cain feels all the horrors of his heinous attempt: *My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon.*—Gen. iv. 13. Thus the perfidious Judas is stunned with the voice of the blood which he had betrayed: *I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.*—Matth. xx. vii. 4.

Thus every sinner is accountable for his conduct to his conscience. Stop, it says to him, thou art upon the brink of a precipice; the law forbids it thee under pain of death; thou wilt answer for it to God. No, there never would be a sin if there never were a resistance to the inward voice of conscience.

3dly. It judges us. The instant the sin is committed against God, the decree of conscience passes against us: Thou hast sinned, thou deservest hell; if thou die in this condition, thou art damned; the moment of thy death will begin to put the sentence in execution. It is, however, God himself the sovereign Judge, who at this time makes his voice be heard, and passes the sentence: conscience is only the instrument and organ of it; it pronounces it in his name, and

condemns under his sovereign authority. In this sense, it is said, that we ourselves are our first judges, and that the first tribunal, to which we are cited, is our own conscience, without our being able to escape from its presence, or call in question its justice, or elude its decree. Yes, the judgment is just, it is dreadful, it is without appeal: penance alone can stop its course and effect; and the more so, because conscience, in pronouncing the sentence, becomes at the same time witness against us, and its deposition is so much more to be dreaded, as it is intimate: clear and personal to us. Ah! how unfortunate is it to be condemned by ourselves, and to have nothing to oppose to the condemnation? And what in effect can be opposed, when our own conscience is the accuser, witness, and judge?

4thly. Therefore it only remains for conscience to assume the character of executioner, and to exercise its vengeance upon us. Dreadful charge, and still more terrible than all the rest! It punishes us; God intrusts the interest of his justice and revenge in its hands; and in how many different ways does it discharge this dreadful office against the sinner after his sin? By those racking remorses which tear him in pieces, by the gnawing worm which eats him up, by the continued consciousness of his guilt, which follows him every where, by the fears, terrors, and continual alarms in which he lives. If he be visited by illness, if the smallest infirmity attack him, death incessantly presents itself to his eyes: If thunders roar, if the earth quake, if any unexpected accident happen he believes that the hand of God is lifted up against him, and fears every instant being swallowed up. Alas! has the sinner need of any more dreadful torture, any more cruel executioner, any more severe minister of vengeance, than his own conscience, which racks and torments him? Was any thing wanting more to torture David, than the bloody spectre of Urias, which presented itself continually to him? Was any thing more necessary to affright the impious Balthasar, than

the sight of that hand which came forth from the wall and wrote his sentence upon it? Did Antiochus stand in need of more than the melancholy representation of the temple of Jerusalem, which had been profaned by him? And why this, but because conscience, whose rights they had injured, seeking atonement, set the remembrance of their crimes continually before them, and made the representation of them serve as an instrument of their chastisement, and its own revenge?

But if there be sinners, who do not experience these interior punishments, may we not say, that they are still more to be pitied, and more unhappy. For if their condition be a punishment of God, a curse of God, a withdrawing of himself from them, can there be a more dreadful, more fatal chastisement? And what does it forbode, but as it were a certain damnation and reprobation for eternity?

Let us then listen to the voice of conscience, let us not stifle its remorses, let us dread its decrees, let us appease its complaints, which are the only means of recovering our calm, and entering into the bosom of peace.

MEDITATION.

ON TROUBLES OF CONSCIENCE.

How great is the unhappiness of man, O my God, when beguiled by the allurement of passion he gives himself up to sin? Trouble, remorse, and terror seize upon him. He is disquieted with trouble, he is torn in pieces with remorses, he is pierced through with terror. Dreadful torment, yet a torment which is beneficial.

God of goodness, God of light, make me comprehend the unhappiness of a conscience in this situation, that I may never expose myself to feel the cruel effects of it.

1st Point. Consider, that when grace departs from

the soul, peace retires with it; trouble and disorder instantaneously succeed; the darkness, spread over the face of Egypt, is a melancholy figure of a troubled conscience: a thousand different thoughts rise up in it: a thousand contrary reflections torment it by turns: the sight of the sin, into which it has fallen, the subtraction of grace which it has lost, the difficulty of returning by repentance overwhelm it, by their different feelings: the sea, when agitated by a furious tempest, has not more violent commotions. In vain does this disquieted heart endeavour to calm its troubles, by giving itself up to outward dissipation. Company, amusements, entertainments, may blunt the edge of its anguish for awhile; but it is only to make deeper wounds in the soul afterwards. Presently entering into himself, in despite of himself, the sinner feels his disquiet redoubled, and he is obliged to drink off the bitter cup with its dregs to the very bottom. Then is he bereft of that interior peace, whose sweetness he formerly relished; then is he deprived of that tranquillity of soul infinitely preferable to the pleasures of the senses; then he is robbed of those inward comforts, which gave him, as it were, a foretaste of the joys of heaven. Of all these things there remains nothing to the sinner but a remembrance of having tasted them, and a regret of having lost them, perhaps for eternity.

Thousands of times have I experienced it, O my God; thousands of times have I said with the Prophet, *Why art thou sorrowful my soul?* Ps. xlii. 2.—But alas! ought I to have sought any other cause of this interior trouble, than my infidelities to thee; and resistance to thy grace? Who ever in opposing thee, in resisting thee, found peace? Can a conscience, which is criminal, be at rest? Will not its sin always be a deadly weapon, which will destroy its rest, and all its contentment? And will it not ever say to itself, that as long as it is guilty, it will be unhappy?

2d Point. Consider, that trouble is presently succeeded by remorse, without its being in the power of

the sinner to screen himself from it. What have I done? is the first thought, which rises in the soul after sin. Unhappy man! what have I done? I have offended my God; I have lost the treasure of his grace; I have sacrificed my right to the heavenly inheritance: I have preferred a momentary pleasure to an eternity of happiness. What have I done?

Before the sin is committed, the heat of passion intoxicates to such a degree, that it prevents almost all reflection; but when the passion is once satisfied, it then relents, and leaves the understanding more at liberty to reflect. Reason having recovered its freedom, it enters into itself, it sees the horror of sin, it calls forth the voice of remorse; and when remorse is roused, who can express the secret language, which conscience utters to the sinner through its mouth? Its reproaches are so much more bitter, as they remind the sinner of the happy state, in which he once lived, and set before him every object, which can contribute to keep that remembrance fresh in his mind. The sight of those virtuous persons, with whom he lived, and whose presence he now dreads; the solemnity of that feast, on which he was accustomed to receive the sacraments, and which now are forbidden him; the sight of that oratory, that picture, that crucifix, before which he used to pour forth the affections of his heart, second conscience in its bitter reproofs, and the correction becomes so much the more sensible, as it is made to the sinner in the midst of himself, in despite of himself and against himself. And didst thou not tell it us, O my God, that sin should one day rise up against us, if we rose against thee; that sin should quickly be followed by remorse, and that remorse would prove a sword of sorrow, which should pierce through our very soul, and plunge it into the deepest distress? Unhappy creature! Was I to buy repentance at so dear a rate?

O my God, how terrible is the state of a soul thus given up to the anguish of its own remorses? Has it a moment of calm? Does it enjoy an instant of peace? Does not remorse constantly stand at the door of the

heart to tear it in pieces? Alas! how is man to be pitied? How unfortunate is he, whilst he finds in himself the cause of his own misery, and carries within himself the fatal poison that consumes him.

3d. Point. Consider, that the unhappiness of the sinner is not yet come to its height. Beside the present remorse, which tears him in pieces, there is a dreadful futurity, which he expects, and which threatens him: and with what feelings must he be penetrated at the sight of this immense career, which futurity opens before him? I have sinned, he says to himself, and thereby I have deserved hell: but if I would die in this state, what would be my lot? Nevertheless I may die at an instant, and each day may be the last of my life. Alas! has not this dreadful day already begun its course to involve me in destruction? But if a sudden and unprovided death seize me, if any unforeseen accident snatch me out of life: Are these accidents so uncommon, and do they not become more frequent every day? Do we not hear continually, that such and such have been taken out of life without having had a moment to prepare themselves? And why, O my God, dost thou set these examples before me, unless it be to open my eyes to the danger, and make me prevent it, lest I should be involved in the same misery, and struck with the same thunderbolt? How often have I been touched and alarmed at these sad rehearsals!

Thus the dreadful threat, which God makes to the sinner, is literally accomplished. *Thou shalt fear*, says he, *night and day, neither shalt thou trust thy life. In the morning thou shalt say*, in thy fright, *who will grant me evening? and at evening, who will grant me morning?* Deut xxviii. 66. 67.—Who will insure to me the light of the returning day?

Dreadful voice of conscience, whitherto dost thou extend thy revengeful cries? The sound of them is heard in the palaces of the great, on the thrones of kings, at the head of armies, in the hurry of cities, in the retirement of the country, and every where they make the torment of the sinner. But how dreadful is

the situation of a soul thus affrighted? What! to be in a state, in which it can and must say to itself, if I happen to die in this condition, I am lost: and the instant I depart out of this world I sink into a miserable eternity: I become the object of the wrath of God; I have no other inheritance left me, than hideous despair. What a state? What torment?

It is, however, a wholesome torment: the misery would be still greater if the sick man were insensible of his evil. Nothing so sad, O my soul, and nevertheless nothing so true; in the state in which thou art, the greatest blessing thou canst have is to be rent with remorses; and on how many titles oughtest not thou to regard these remorses as a real grace? They are a grace, since they have an essential connexion with thy salvation: they are the first of graces, since thy conversion must begin from thence, if it ever does begin: they are the most necessary of all graces, since without them there never can be a conversion: they are the most solid grace, since they cannot be subject to illusion, and only tend to draw thee back to the right road: they are the most precious grace, since every wholesome remorse which we have is merited us by as many drops of the blood of Jesus Christ: they are sometimes even the only grace, since the sinner has sometimes no other grace given him than remorse and prayer, having shut the entrance of his heart to every other grace.

Let us enter at this moment into ourselves, and without either presumptuously flattering or foolishly abandoning ourselves to idle scruples, let us seriously examine how we are with God: we can be but in one of these three different states; either our conscience reproaches us with nothing; or we are in some doubt; or we acknowledge ourselves to be guilty of some sin.

1st. If our conscience be at peace, and reproach us with nothing essential, let us bless the Father of mercies who has placed us in this state, and never do any thing that can put us out of it: never let the clouds of sin rise to disturb the serenity of grace.

2dly. If we be in any doubt, and suffer uneasiness on any point whatsoever, let us take care to clear it up immediately, and not remain in affected ignorance, which thereby would necessarily become criminal.

3dly. If our conscience reproach us with some sin of which it is guilty; ah! let us not defer an instant being reconciled to God: let us rid ourselves of the heavy burden; even this day let us give back peace to our conscience; the moment, wherein we would delay, is perhaps that which God has chosen for our repentance; let us turn it to profit; it may decide our lot for eternity.

Conclude from the foregoing considerations, 1st, To make it an inviolable law with thyself never to act against the lights of thy conscience.

2dly. In cases of doubt, ever to do what thou wilt wish to have done at the hour of death.

3dly. Often to examine the interior state of thy conscience; see what passes in it; whether it reproach thee with any thing in the sight of God, with which thou wilt be unwilling to appear one day before him.

4thly. To remember, that thy conscience will one day judge thee, and if thou at present stiflest its voice, it will pass the more severe sentence against thee.

THE COLLOQUY.

Permit me not, O my God, ever to fall into the wretched state of sin, that I may not have the misfortune of being given up to the uneasiness, the remorses, and frights of a troubled conscience. But if I should be so unhappy as to fall again into sin, ah! Lord, so far from leaving me at rest, increase, redouble my uneasiness, my frights, that I may not experience the greater misery of being abandoned to a deceitful peace, which flatters and destroys. As long as thou shal torment and threaten me, thy threats and reproofs will be a ray of mercy, which will shine to mine eyes: but the moment thou leavest me quiet in my disorder, thy silence will be the most sensible mark of thy indignation,

and forebode with greatest certainty my ruin. Speak then, O my God, thy servant hears; if my conscience has been hitherto deaf to thy voice, my heart shall be open to the voice of sorrow; join the tender affections of thy love: it is the only happiness which I desire henceforward in the world.

FOURTH LESSON.

ON FAITH.

Without Faith it is impossible to please God.—Heb. xi. 6.

God has endowed us with faith; he has enlightened us with his heavenly light; we received it as a precious inheritance from our ancestors; we acknowledge it to be a grace; but have we ever known the price and advantages of it? Behold what faith is in our regard, and what each of us may say to himself on the same subject with the warm affections of a grateful heart.

I am incorporated in the true faith, and faith is to me an indissoluble bond, which unites me to the church; an infallible rule, which settles all my doubts; a solid comfort, which supports me in the sufferings of life; finally, a wholesome consideration, which gives me courage at the approach of death. Precious faith! what am I not indebted to thee, since thou art the source of all these advantages to me?

I am incorporated in the true faith, and faith is to me a sacred tie, which unites me to the church: in effect, we do not belong to the church, but in as much as we are its members, and we are not members of it, but in as much as we are united to it by faith. Without faith we are in the eyes of the church as so many wandering sheep cast out of the sheep-fold; as alien members not belonging to the body: but the moment we are found to be animated with faith, the church admits us into the society of the faithful; we belong to the holy nation, we are numbered with the children of God; and if we follow the dictates of faith, we acquire a right to the heavenly inheritance. Let others then

boast of being born in the palaces of kings, of being children of the great men of the earth, I will ever glory in being a dutiful child of the church ; because on that title I am sure of being in the road to heaven, and walking in the path of salvation, which is that of faith, and of faith alone. Every other road can only lead us down precipices to the deepest abyss of misery.

But perhaps it will be said, that many regular, upright and irreproachable men are seen out of the bosom of the church, that there are persons who practise good works, make long prayers, fast, give alms, &c. all which are great and laudable actions. But to all these titles there is one essential wanting, viz. docility to faith, without which there is neither merit, salvation, nor recompense. Splendent, but barren works ! apparently delicious fruit, but rotten within ! In vain then shall they glory in these works ; the gospel will always tell them, that he, *who does not believe, is already judged:* John iii. 18.—the apostle will ever declare to them, that *without faith it is impossible to please God:* Heb. xi. 6.—Jesus Christ himself will ever command us to look upon *him as the heathen and the publican, who will not hear the church;* Matt. xviii. 17.—though otherwise he should be as severe in his life as an anchoret, as enlightened in his understanding as an angel. What then will be the astonishment, sorrow, and despair of those, who void of faith and separated from the church, will go one day to present themselves before God, and imagining to have heaped up treasures of merits will appear in his sight with their hand empty? O how different is my lot ? While faith is animated with charity, not a moment passes which I cannot set down to account for heaven ; not an action is done which is not written in the book of life ; not a talent that I possess which does not produce its hundred fold interest for eternity. But behold a second advantage of faith equally valuable as the former.

2dly. I am incorporated in the true faith, and faith is to me an infallible rule, which settles all my doubts. In effect, on how many occasions am I under the ne-

cessity of having recourse to faith to appease and settle my uneasiness in point of belief? Sometimes reason, ever restless and inquisitive, will undertake to canvass the mysteries of religion: at the sight of the clouds and obscurities that present themselves, it finds itself stopped every moment: it asks itself, why is this? how is that? These impenetrable mysteries seem to overwhelm it with their weight. If I have only recourse to the feeble light of reason, to what straits am I reduced? but if I call in faith to my assistance, I am strengthened: the *why* and *how* disappear; why is this? Because God has taught it; how is that? In the manner he has revealed it to his church. The whole is said in these two words; these two answers solve every difficulty, and remove every doubt.

At other times, self-conceited and indocile persons, such as are frequently met with in the world, will propose numberless questions to me, and start difficulties on the most intricate and sublime points: If I rely wholly on myself, perhaps I shall not be able to satisfy them fully: but if mistrusting my own weakness, I call them to the standard of faith, in two words I answer all, what does the church say? what does faith teach? That is what I believe and to what I adhere: God grant that I may never desire to know any thing more.

Hitherto we have only spoke of private and personal difficulties; but in case of public contests, which arise among doctors of the church, and form different parties, if I am again left to the deceitful guidance of my own reason, what will become of me in those days of darkness? On both sides I see men of learning; they produce their reasons; they object their difficulties: to what am I to hold? To faith. I grant it: but where is the true faith? as each party flatters itself to have it, and declares itself an advocate of the truth. Here is the trying moment, but I take my determination without danger of being deceived. The church, the church, the body of Bishops united to their head the Vicar of Christ upon earth, shall give me the rule, these are my oracle. In vain then shall any other,

either party or sect, or cabal, make their delusive proposals to me. Immortal thanks be given to faith; it has again calmed my troubles, it has dispersed my alarms, it continues to favour me with its protection.

3dly. I am incorporated in the true faith, and faith is to me a solid comfort, which supports me, in the sufferings of life; for though we allow reason to have sufficient force to support us on many trying occasions, yet there are other trials in which we have need of all the strength of religion to prevent us from sinking. Some accidents are so dreadful, some events so distressing, that common consolations are utterly insufficient in them. In the anguish and oppression of growing sorrows, reason purely natural will in vain remind me of the instability of human things; in vain will it paint to me the vanity of worldly goods; its instructions slide over the surface of my soul without penetrating; the heart is unaffected. In vain will the wisdom of philosophy and the severity of your stoics display their pompous maxims for my relief, and tell me, that a wise man is not to be disturbed at casual events; that man is not made but to possess himself, and soar above the misfortunes of life. Ah! depart from me, ye insipid comforters, let me feed on my sorrow in private; it oppresses, yet pleases me; so far from assuaging it, ye add to its anguish by throwing on the heavy weight of a burdensome consolation. In vain will faithful friends, touched at my lot, strive to comfort me by assuring me, that they take part in my misfortunes, that they are sensible to my affliction: I listen to them outwardly with deference, but I hear more my own sorrow. I know not how, but all their words seem only to carry emptiness and dryness with them; nothing touches me; In spite of all I remain ingulfed in the abyss of my distress.

But let faith only come to my assistance; aided by its unerring light I see through the dark cloud, and perceive that my affliction may contribute to my happiness, that this affliction enters into the order of graces ordained for my salvation, that the source of my pre-

sent tears may become the source of my future bliss. If faith tells me, that by my afflictions I may expiate my sins, appease the wrath of God, merit a place among the elect ; if it represents to me a God raised on his cross to serve me as a model; if it opens heaven to my eyes as the reward of my labours ; if it points out a happy eternity as the term of my misfortunes . . . Ah! then my heart begins to open to the feelings of patience, my mind listens to wholesome reflections, my sorrow seems less bitter, and if it is not yet pleasing, it begins at least not be painful to me. O powerful and divine faith, it only appertains to thee to work these wonders: thou presentest a dying God to me, I fall down and adore him: thou offerest me a cross, I take it up and embrace it; thou showest me eternity, I hope for its happiness. Nothing less than thou, could have appeased the raging tempest of my sorrow ; thou appearest, and it is changed into an ocean of delights.

4thly. Complete then thy work, all-saving faith, and having been my consolation in the sufferings of life, supply the solid reflection to support me at the hour of death. It will acquit itself of this benign office, and it is chiefly then that it will make us experience the precious advantages that are contained in it.

I die in the true faith, a faithful soul will say to itself, I expire in the bosom of the church ; my last moments shall be consecrated to faith, and my latest sighs shall be sent forth in its hands. Receive, divine faith, the homage I render thee ; may I thereby be able to expiate the affronts I heretofore offered thee. At least, I now acknowledge that thou art the only way of salvation, and the only road that can lead me to God. How honourable to faith is the confession of the dying man ? But how comfortable at the same time is it to himself ?

The church itself believes, that this reflection is so comfortable to man at his last hour, and so capable of touching the heart of God, that in the prayers it offers up to him for agonizing souls, it reminds him of the faith which the dying man professed during his life.

God of mercies, says it to him, in the feelings of its confidence, behold a soul which is on the point of appearing before thee; it has many reasons to dread its awful departure; but still remember, that, in the height of all its excesses, it always preserved its faith. Adorable Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, it always confessed your name: it now presents this faith to you, together with its sighs; regard the offering, and deign to receive it into the bosom of your mercy. Depart then, Christian soul, continues the church, filled with confidence; depart, though thy sins shall accuse thee, thy faith will speak for thee, and plead loudly in thy favour. This is the last and most precious pledge of its affection which faith can give us. It will bestow it on us one day, if, during life, we are faithful to it, if we preserve its sentiments, and regulate our conduct by its holy maxims.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

It is an unspeakable happiness for us, O my God, to be members of the true faith; but it is not enough to know and relish this happiness; we have contracted obligations together with it; those obligations consist in four different kinds of homage, which faith exacts of us, viz. an homage of submission in listening to it with docility; an homage of affection in loving it with tenderness; an homage of zeal in defending its interest with fervour; an homage of action in doing honour to it by our works. O God, the author and finisher of our faith, who hast deigned to enlighten me with its divine light, grant me not only the grace of knowing my obligations to it, but the grace also of acquitting myself of those obligations.

1st Point. Consider what must be the sacred characters of the homage of submission which is due to faith. It must be an humble and docile submission, which is the portion of all the true children of the church. Faith demands it in so indispensable and ab-

solute a manner, that if any one chance to depart from this spirit, it disavows, it condemns him, it arms itself against him with all its imprecations. He is thenceforward no longer regarded but as an ungovernable sheep; unfortunate for him, if, during his wandering thus astray, he falls into the jaws of the ravening wolf! he becomes as *a stumbling-stone, and a rock of scandal,* Rom. ix. 33.—which cannot make a part of the building of the heavenly Jerusalem; he is, as it were, a rotten member, which must be lopped off, for fear of communicating its contagion to the rest.

It must be a firm and unshaken submission, so as to sacrifice all, to suffer all, to lose all, rather than lose faith, or even run the hazard of losing it. Goods, honours, health, liberty, life itself, are valuable possessions, but if all these stand in competition with faith, all must yield to faith; and when necessary, a trophy must be raised to faith from the spoils of all these things.

It must be an interior submission of the heart, which is the altar whereon our homage must be offered to faith. When faith commands, it has a right to the most secret thoughts of the soul and intimate sentiments of the heart. Outward obedience, a respectful silence, a show of deference will not suffice. No, faith is not contented with this; it would be only presenting the hand, when it demands the heart. Divine faith! holy church! *Let my right hand be forgotten,* if ever it sets its sign to what gives the lie to my understanding; *let my* withered *tongue cleave to my jaws,* Ps. cxxxvi. 5, 6.—if it ever pronounces words which my heart disavows: my religion instructs me to speak, and not to disguise; my faith teaches me to yield my life rather than to tell a lie. A faith which should authorise me to use such duplicity, should never meet with any thing but my most unfeigned abhorrence; be gone, I would say to it, thou art not a Christian faith; Pagan morality has the preference to thee.

2d Point. Consider the second homage due to faith, viz. an homage of tender affection. The church is our mother; and when that word is pronounced, a feeling

heart better understands the meaning of it, than words can express. Holy church, tender mother, how can we mistake thee under this amiable appellation? In effect, on how many titles dost thou deserve this endearing name? It is thou who engenderest me in Jesus Christ, thou broughtest me forth from thy womb, thou receivest me into thy arms, thou nourishedst me with thy milk, thou feddest me in my hunger with the heavenly manna and bread of angels; thou refreshedst me in my thirst with the immortal draught of the blood of the Lamb, thus cherishing me with thy gifts from my infancy, and loading me with thy favours as I advanced in the stage of life, marking out to me the road of salvation, leading me by the hand through the ways of God, inviting me kindly to return if I went astray, and receiving me with tenderness when I came back. How many prayers didst thou address to the Lord for me? How many sacrifices were offered on thy altars? How many helps were procured me for heaven? Thy bounties are not terminated here: As it was in thy bosom that I had the happiness of being nursed with the milk of life, so it is in thy arms that I hope to breathe out my last; it is by thy hands that I must be presented to the Father of mercies; it is by thy help and by the assistance of thy recommendation, that I hope for admittance to his glory. On whom then shall I bestow my regard, if I refuse it to thee? Are not justice, gratitude, interest, so many eloquent tongues which plead in thy favour, and demand my heart for thee? I devote it therefore to thee, with all its affections, forever. All my powers of loving are thine; but by what marks shall I be able to testify my love to thee?

3d Point. Consider that zeal for faith is the most secure pledge we can give of our love, and what it will receive with the greatest complacency. Can a Christian be wanting in zeal for his faith? We believe we have it; we flatter ourselves that we are possessed of it; but have we got it in effect? Let us judge ourselves by the standing mark of this zeal. O my God, what a trial will it be, and what sentence shall I re-

ceive? We are Christians by name: are we such in our behaviour and manners?

For the exercise of our faith we have the commandments and holy laws to observe. Do we fulfil these commandments? Do we respect these laws? This is zeal; can we flatter ourselves that we are animated with it? Our faith has its interests; have we these at heart? If it meets with success, do we share with it in its joy? If it suffers losses, are we sensibly afflicted at them? This is zeal, and the only zeal approved by faith. Each one must answer for himself on these heads; but for my part what can I answer, unless it be to condemn myself? Our faith has enemies to fear, persecutions to bear, attacks to repel; we are sensible thereof. What feelings do we conceive on these occasions? Does the zeal of the house of the Lord eat up our heart, as it did that of the Prophet? Do we speak, act, and live for the defence of faith? Or if our condition does not allow us to argue and dispute in support of it, (for it is not suitable for every one to do so) do we at least pray for it? Do we pray for its conversation? Do we pray for its defenders? Do we pray for its children? Do we pray for its enemies? Do we, like Moses, raise our hands to heaven, in its behalf, whilst other champions are fighting its battles? Without sharing their labours, we should then be entitled to a share of the spoils; for oftentimes the man who prays, as well as he who is *obedient*, *speaketh victory*. Prov. xxi. 28. — O divine faith, thou foundest this ardent zeal heretofore in the first Christians: They presented the offering of it to thee sprinkled with their own blood: What have I hitherto done to testify mine? At least henceforward I will endeavour to rouse up this zeal in my heart. Are not my past insensibility and indifference pressing motives to urge me to it?

4th Point. Consider that the last precious homage which we owe to faith, is the homage of our works. Faith and works must be always joined together and walk hand in hand: Works without faith are barren works, and faith without works is dead. The tree is

known by its fruits, said our Saviour, and the Christian should be known by his works. Without our being asked, our actions should declare what our religion is. We do not carry our faith written on our forehead, but we must announce it in our behaviour, and make it be respected by our conduct, by works, which answer to faith, which do honour to it, which preserve and keep it alive. The love of God, the renunciation of ourselves, charity to our brethren, mutual edification, are the glorious testimony which we must bear to faith, if faith lives in us. But what will it be, O my God, if in lieu of these works, which should support, do honour to, and preserve my faith, I should contradict it by my works, dishonour and expose it to danger, and, by a too natural consequence, entirely lose it?

And would it be a matter of astonishment, if, by thus contradicting, dishonouring and exposing our faith, we should come at length to lose it? And is it not exposing it, to expose ourselves to occasions, in which we know it runs every danger? To form connexions with persons of a suspected character? To listen to seducing discourses, in which the old serpent spreads his venom? To delight in profane and criminal reading, equally calculated to poison the understanding and infect the heart? If we assume the privilege of speaking of every thing, of judging of every thing, of deciding on every thing, can we after that complain of suffering temptations against faith? Or how is it possible that faith should subsist in us, when we are using every means to destroy it? *When the son of man comes*, said our Saviour heretofore, *shall he find, think you, faith on earth?* Alas! adorable Saviour, without waiting for the end of the world, wert thou to come at present wouldst thou find much amongst us? Take not away from us this sacred treasure, extinguish not this heavenly torch, deprive us not of this precious portion of thy inheritance; chastise us, we deserve it; but carry not thy wrath to the degree of bereaving us of thy holy spirit, and withdrawing from us the light

and gift of faith. *Cast me not away from thy face, and take not thy holy spirit from me.*—Ps. l. 13.

Conclude from the foregoing considerations, 1st. Often to make acts of faith, and to revive the sentiments of it in your heart.

2dly. To act in all things, as far as you can, by the spirit of faith.

3dly. To renew from time to time your profession of faith, and the promises you made in baptism.

4thly. To respect with particular devotion the smallest practices of piety, which are consecrated by the sanction of faith, and used in the service of the church.

5thly. To detest all books, discourses, connexions, which can have the least influence in prejudicing your faith, and frequently to pray to God to preserve it in you to your last breath.

THE COLLOQUY.

What thanks have I to return to you, O my God, for having admitted me into the true faith, and enlightened me with its divine light in preference to so many others, who *sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death*? Luke i. 79.—What have I done to deserve such a favour, and what am I not bound to do to testify my just, my lively, and eternal acknowledgment for it? I understand the great happiness which this faith procures me; but I am also sensible of what it demands, and what tributes of homage it has a right to exact of me. I offer them to you at present, and all my life long I will endeavour faithfully to acquit myself of this debt in the name and by the assistance of my faith.

I humbly submit to every decision of faith, I respectfully believe all it teaches, I embrace it with all the affection of my soul, I never will forget its interests, I will strive to do honour to it in all my actions, I purpose never to disgrace it by word or work. Faith shall be the soul of my sentiments and the regulator of my conduct; I will judge of things according to the

views of faith. My thoughts, my resolutions shall be animated with the spirit of faith. Preserve it in me, O my God, that during life it may be the rule of my conduct, and that at death it may receive my parting sighs, return my soul into your hands, and introduce it into the mansions of the elect.

FIFTH LESSON.

ON PROVIDENCE.

O the depth of the riches, and of the wisdom, and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable are his ways?—Rom. xi. 33.

THERE is a providence: It is the duty of man to acknowledge it, to submit to it, to second its views.

There is a providence: The proofs of it evidently appear in all things; we find them in God, in the world, and in ourselves. In God; the light of reason discovers it to us in his very essence. In the world; the sight of this universe makes it manifest to our eyes. In ourselves; the intimate feeling of our soul demonstrates it to us.

1st. This essential truth is drawn from the very nature of God. There is a God: If there be a God, there is an infinitely perfect Being; if there is an infinitely perfect Being, he is infinitely wise, infinitely good, infinitely powerful. If he is wise, he must know the nature of order; if he is good, he must love order; if he is powerful, he must establish it. The establishment of order is the first and immediate effect of providence; therefore there is a providence. If there be a God, he is the end of all things, as he is the first beginning of them. If he is the last end of all things, he must conduct them infallibly to their term; to lead them thither, he must choose and adapt suitable means; to choose means for an end, and to adapt those means

tc the end, is the proper effect of providence; therefore there is a providence.

But I ask, Is God every where? Or has Immensity itself ceased being immense: If he be every where, he sees every where, he knows, he acts, he rules: to see, know, act, and rule, as God, is nothing less than providence. Would not the denial of this truth be sapping the very foundation and base of all others, and plunging the universe into a more deplorable chaos and confusion than the nothing from whence it was first drawn?

2dly. But how can providence escape from the light of reason, whilst it is rendered in a manner palpable to our senses in the structure of this universe? Who shall be able, said the prophet, to *make the* wonderful *harmony of heaven to sleep?* Job xxxviii. 37.—When, in a still and serene night, I lift up my eyes to heaven, and behold the striking spectacle which the firmament presents to me, those numberless stars, which march, as it were, in battalia through the immense spaces of heaven under the standard of providence which conducts them; the brilliant and lively splendour of the celestial bodies, which, like so many resplendent diamonds, give lustre to the heavens; the admirable regularity of their motions; at a determinate hour the star is to rise, and it appears: the moment is fixed for its setting, and it vanishes: the constancy and perpetuity of their courses; from the beginning of the world, without interruption and interval, we have seen their evolutions begin, end, and return again. When I behold all this, can I call providence in question? And what ear so deaf, as not to be enchanted with the heavenly melody of this unspeakable concert?

From the heavens let us cast down our eyes on the earth. What new glaring instances of providence appear in the variety of objects with which it is so plentifully stored, trees, plants, fruits, animals? The different rivers, which like so many veins, carry their refreshing waters through the thirsty parts of the

earth; trees loaded with fruits, and meadows diversified with flowers. What shall we say of the constant succession of the seasons? With what justness have they divided the year, as if the parts of it were weighed out to them in a balance? Do they not appear, says St. Chrysostom, like four sisters, which have equally portioned out the inheritance of their father? Each one is religiously content with her own allowance, and extends her views no farther; whilst all seem ambitious to pour forth their precious gifts into our bosoms, as the share of power passes through their hands. Spring revives the earth, and clothes it with a pleasing verdure. Summer enriches the fields with its golden crops. Autumn bends under the weight of its plentiful fruits. Winter fosters the seed in the pregnant bosom of the earth. Is this harmony of the earth less wonderful than that of the heavens?

I pass from thence to the banks of an immense ocean. What new traces of providence are discovered in its fathomless depth, and in its unbounded extent, in its calms, and in its tempests? Now quiet and undisturbed it sets before me the image of the unalterable peace of its Creator; then roused up to fury and indignation, it makes me tremble under the omnipotent hand, that formed so awful an element; always bounded within itself, it makes me adore the wise dispositions of providence, which has fixed its limits, that cannot be passed. I see immense waves, like rolling mountains, advance towards me; a few grains of sand scattered on the shore stop their fury, and make them respect the order, which providence has written thereon not to proceed: *Hitherto thou shalt come, and shalt go no further, and here thou shalt break thy swelling waves.*—Job xxxviii. 11.

O thou, who refusest the tribute of thy homage to providence, doubt still of it, if thou canst; but before thou avowest thy doubt, interrupt that wonderful harmony which reigns through the creation; extinguish the celestial lamps which shine over our heads; forbid the night to succeed the day; change the regula-

tions of times, seasons, and the productions of the earth; break down the boundaries of the ocean, and, to say something still more, introduce into the universe the disorder and confusion which reign in thy own heart, and then in the wild licentiousness of thy presumptuous judgment dare to ask: is there a providence? But if, on the contrary, thy reason cannot admit such extravagance; if it compels thee to acknowledge a providence in the universe, then unite thy voice to that of all other creatures, and join the melodious harmony, which they send forth from every side in its honour.

3dly. But let us attend to a still more persuasive voice, the voice of our own feeling, which speaks within us; for here we have no need of reasoning: the only thing to be apprehended is reasoning too much. Our first judgment decides immediately in favour of providence; and who can refuse submitting to the plain simplicity of unartful decision. I see a family remarkable for its peace, order and regularity; I say, there is a head, who presides in that family. I behold a peaceful state, in which the arts flourish, laws are observed, and justice respected; I say there is a sovereign, who commands in that state. I observe a large flock of sheep grazing in fertile pastures, afterwards they herd together in the same fold, and are sheltered from the jaws of the ravenous wolf; I say there is a careful shepherd, who keeps his watch over that flock. I remark a vessel in open sea running with all its sails unfurled before the wind, and making directly into port; I say, without hesitation, there is a skilful pilot, who holds his hand to the rudder of that vessel; at that same time I view the world suspended as it were in balance in the air, and I see in this world order, beauty, variety, regularity, constancy, and I am told it is chance.—O Chance! How wise, how enlightened, how steady must thou be? I can but call thee almost divine.—But in saying it is chance, can any man flatter himself, that he will persuade others to adopt that opinion? Can he be persuaded of it himself? Does not the intimate feeling of his heart rise up against the deceitful language of his

tongue, and even on many occasions force from him an open acknowledgment of divine Providence? In sudden danger, in unforeseen accidents his eyes are raised to heaven, he cries, my God! But why should his eyes be turned to heaven, if the eye of Providence is shut? Why should he invoke a God, if a God cannot hear him?

Ah my God! Must we all therefore cry out with the Prophet, and without going forth from ourselves must we acknowledge sensible proofs of Providence within us? In vain do we strive to doubt, and resist it; it triumphs over our doubts, and vanquishes our opposition: and all our efforts to deny it proving in the end fruitless, they only serve to imprint the idea of Providence deeper in our heart, and force us to conclude, that there is a superior intelligence, which presides over the universe; an eye, which sees; an arm, which acts; a wisdom, which directs; a strength, which supports; an eternity, which preserves; that is, a Providence, which sees, rules, and disposes of all things; a Providence, which we are bound to acknowledge and adore, to obey and second in its views. This is the conclusion of every wise man. Every other notion is nothing but deplorable blindness, and perhaps the most dreadful punishment which God can inflict.

A CONFERENCE

Between the soul and God, on the conduct of Providence.

Soul. Nothing so true, O my God: To abide by the verdict of all those wonderful works, which we behold, we are compelled to acknowledge and adore a Providence; but permit me, O God of goodness, to open my heart before thee, to impart my doubts and perplexities to thee, to seek for comfort amidst my pains and uneasiness in communicating them to thee. When I cast my eyes on this vast universe, and see all that passes in it, I look for a Providence; but it seems to have vanished; its splendour is eclipsed from my eyes. When I behold that unequal distribution of the

goods of this world ; some have all things and others have nothing ; some are born in plenty, and roll in riches, others groan in misery, and only feed on the bread of affliction ; some seem to have come into the world to be happy, and others at their birth to have had the fatal decree written on their forehead, that nothing shall prosper with them : all nevertheless are children of this Providence : how am I to understand this so remarkable inequality in their situations? Why is this a king, and that a subject? Why is this man endowed with power to command, as a master, and that compelled to serve as a slave ? Why, being all children of God, are they not all made equal ? And why, being destined to the same term, are they not all conducted through the same path ?

But still further: not only the goods of this world are portioned out unequally, but the impious and wicked are oftentimes the privileged persons in this astonishing division : if any partiality ought to be shown, on whom apparently should the favour fall ? Who, without surprise, can see the wicked dispensing the law, and the just compelled to receive it ? A Job sitting on a dunghill, and an Achab adored in his palace? A St. Paul on the scaffold, and a Nero on the throne ? Considering then what is so frequently seen in the world, viz. iniquity triumphant and innocence oppressed, vice domineering and virtue trodden under foot, is not our reason struck with astonishment and often tempted to cry out, Where is Equity ? Where is Providence ? Where art thou just God ? Bountiful God ? Powerful God ? Support my faith, pardon the agitation of my mind, and deign to appease the trouble of my soul.

God. Soul of little faith, to what uneasiness, to what excess do thy unguarded sentiments betray thee? How long wilt thou judge of things according to human appearance ? I will deign however to condescend to thy weakness to raise thee to my exalted views. Thou askest within thyself, whether this inequality of situations and fortune is the work of Providence ? Has

Providence, sayest thou, ordained that some should be rich, some poor ; that some should be sovereigns, and others subjects ? some masters, and others slaves ? But consider and reflect : if there were a perfect equality in the fortunes and conditions of men, how could mankind, how could civil society, and the union of its members possibly subsist ? Found two indifferent cities, one composed of the great and rich, the other entirely of the low and poor : the establishment of the poor thou easily understandest would soon fall to ruin : but would that of the rich have a longer duration ? In this equality of rank and fortune, where all are upon one footing, all equally rich, and at their ease, who would take upon himself the painful and laborious yet necessary tasks of life, whilst others should be employed only in quiet and honourable functions ? Who in quality of a labourer would water the ground with his sweat, whilst others are reposing in the bosom of luxury and delights ? In a town wouldst thou make all populace without distinction, or all magistrates endowed with authority ? And in the universe shall all be subject, or all intrusted with power, or if no one is appointed to command, and no one subject, what will the universe be but a building of Babel ?

Hence this inequality of states and conditions, so far from being contrary to Providence, is on the other hand the certain effect of it, and because there is a Providence, there must be an inequality of states and conditions. It appertained to that wisdom, which comprehends all things, to unite men among themselves by the ties of subordination and dependency, to the end, that, by the fortunate comforting the unhappy, and by the rich assisting the poor and unhappy, the rich and fortunate, should unite their voices together to proclaim the praises of that Providence which governs all.

Soul. But supposing then, O my God, a necessity of this unequal distribution of the goods of the world among men, why, under such inequality should not

the just be privileged in preference to the wicked? Why not confide the exercise of power and riches to the good, who would make a proper use of them, instead of bestowing them on the wicked, who abuse and dishonour their trust?

God. Acknowledge here again the prudent dispositions of my Providence, when thou contemplatest my wisdom. Why do I refuse earthly goods to the just? With a view, that they may not cease to be just; in opulency they would grow haughty, and be perverted. I refuse them, thereby to exercise their virtue and increase their crown. Job renders me more honour on a dunghill, than all the kings of the earth on their thrones. On the other hand, why do I bestow earthly goods on sinners? To show the vanity and nothingness of them, whilst I make use of them as a bait to engage and draw my very enemies to myself by a prospect of temporal rewards, of which they are more sensible, than of any other. I grant them, to the end that they may have an opportunity of expiating their sins, by making a proper use of them, or that I may repay them for the little good they do in this life. I reward their natural virtues with natural recompenses: thus I formerly bestowed the empire of the world on the Romans, in return for the moral virtues they practised.

Nevertheless, the conduct of my providence in this point is not always uniform. I do not always refuse earthly goods to the just, lest some should be tempted to imagine, that these temporal blessings are not the work of my hand, if I were never to bestow them on those who serve me. And I do not always grant them to sinners, as it would be engaging others to sin, if they were to see, that, to be endowed with temporal happiness, it would suffice to be wicked. But my Providence disposes otherwise, and by a prudent temperament, which it observes towards the one and the other, it keeps both within the proper bounds which it prescribes them, and restrains their desires under the veil of the impenetrable secrets which it reserves to itself.

Soul. I adore thy designs, O my God ; but permit me to unfold my heart once more before thee on my own personal misfortunes, and on the conduct of thy Providence relating to the particular circumstances in which I am. I have omitted nothing, it seems, that should render this Providence favourable and propitious to me, and yet it withdraws itself from my eyes. I made choice of a state, and I am unfortunate in it : I embarked in various undertakings after recommending the success of them to thee in my prayers, and imploring the prayers of my fellow Christians, and they miscarry. None of my enterprises answer : if I engage in any affair, it is attended with ill success ; every thing turns against me ; my friends abandon me, my enemies persecute me ; even thou thyself, O my God, seemest to forsake me. Were I not afraid of blaspheming, I would say, where is Providence ?

God. Stop, faithless soul, thou givest thyself up to the bitterness of thy anguish, thou sufferest, thou groanest, thou droopest under the weight of affliction ; but knowest thou what the designs of my Providence are over thee? Wait the moment and the time of my decrees. and when time shall be elapsed, thou wilt see all unravelled before thee ; the veil shall be withdrawn, and Providence shall justify itself in thy eyes. It is true, if thou wert to be for ever upon earth, and hadst nothing to hope for beyond it, thou wouldst have reason to be distressed and afflicted : but when thou reflectest, that if thy God has placed thee in this world, it is not for ever; that the earth is only a place of pilgrimage and banishment for thee, a dwelling for a while, and time of trial, that thou wilt there pass a certain number of days, after which a new order of things will disclose itself to thy eyes, and assign thee thy reward or punishment, according to thy deserts : in this point of view canst thou call my Providence in question, as if thy labours were to be fruitless, as if thy tears were never to be dried up, as if thy virtues and trials were to be without a reward ? And shouldst thou not, on the contrary, say to thyself, if there is

a Providence, it must be so: the traveller must go through the toils of his journey before he can relish the sweets of his own home: gold must be cleansed in the fire to come forth pure and splendent; the grain must rot in the earth to bring forth a hundred-fold return; finally, to reap in gladness we must have sown in tears.

After all, frail mortal, know that in spite of all thy endeavours, and all thy searches, there will always remain for thee impenetrable mysteries in my Providence; and if carrying thy views beyond the limits which are prescribed thee, thou continuest to ask in all things, why and how? fear that dreadful oracle being pronounced against thee: *He that is a searcher of Majesty shall be overwhelmed by glory.*—Prov. xxv. 27.

Presumptuous soul, bewail thy presumption, and learn to adore the wise dispositions of my Providence not to discuss them: sinful soul, tremble under the hand of God, and fear, lest Providence, for thy punishment, abandon thee to the errors of thy own judgment. And thou faithful and humble soul, adore the designs of God, respect his awful darkness, and conclude in the sentiments of humble faith, that there is a Providence which thou must acknowledge, that there is a Providence to which thou must submit, that there is a Providence whose views thou must second by joining thy own endeavours, care and assiduity to forward its holy dispositions. Thou canst do nothing without the assistance of God's grace; but God will not do all without thy corresponding with his grace: be aiding to thyself, and he will lead thee by the hand, and being thus led, thou wilt infallibly arrive at the term where Providence has prepared eternal happiness for thy reward.

THE CONCLUSION.

How blind and mad are we, O my God, to pretend to sound the unfathomable depths of thy Providence! Do we not deserve that thou shouldst abandon us to

the darkness of our own errors, and permit us to run astray in the deceitful paths of our own fancies? What then do we pretend to? Is it not enough for us to know that thou art good; that from the moment we commit ourselves to thy Providence, thou leadest us by the hand; that thou canst not forsake those who place all their trust in thee; that, on the other hand, all our own schemes and reflections are useless and vain, oftentimes rash and presumptuous; that they are calculated to estrange thy tender care and affection from us, and only serve to precipitate us into doubts, sins, and unhappiness?

O divine Providence, I give myself to thee without reserve, I cast myself irrevocably into thy arms, I leave myself to thy sovereign disposal. Thou art my Creator, my God, and my Father; thou knowest the nothing from whence thou hast drawn me; the slime of which thou madest me; the end to which thou hast destined me; the road which must lead me thither: Dispose therefore of all, and regulate all according to thy pleasure. I only desire henceforward to know one thing relating to Providence, which is, to respect, to adore, and submit to it, and, as far as is depending on me, to second its views, after that to hope for all from thy goodness. Can our dependence be in better hands than in those of the tenderest of Fathers?

SIXTH LESSON.

ON IMMORTALITY.

Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption.—Psalm xv. 10.

Whilst on one hand every thing presents to us death and the dissolution of our bodies formed of the slime of the earth, so on the other, all things announce the immortality of our souls created to the image of God. Faith, reason, our own intimate feeling, the common consent of nations, all jointly combine to es-

tablish the valuable privilege of a glorious immortality. Faith assures us of it by its oracles; the light of reason demonstrates it to us; our own intimate feelings make us continually aspire to this happy term; we are sensible, that after death some part of us will still subsist; finally, the general, and, as it were, the unanimous consent of nations, concurs in the support of this fundamental truth.

As it is to Christians that these holy lessons are addressed, it would be offering an insult to their faith to undertake to prove so essential an article of their religion; let us be satisfied with setting before them the precious advantages of it, and engaging them to render themselves worthy of them.

No thought so great, so fruitful, and so beneficial to us as the thought of the immortality of our soul well considered. It becomes a source of the greatest blessings to us.

It raises our sentiments, it sanctifies our actions, it satisfies our most unbounded desires, it comforts us in all our afflictions. Let us enter into the great views which it sets before us: Nothing so worthy of us as to know what we are in the order of grace.

1st. It raises our sentiments. Nothing so true: the misfortune of man usually comes from not knowing himself or from only knowing himself ill: he neither knows what he is capable of, nor what he expects, nor even oftentimes what he is: we are deceived when we imagine that our being chiefly consists in the body, in which we live: no, undoubtedly that body made of a little clay, it is not us, it is rather our prison: the soul is properly our existence: in that our solid greatness consists. O deplorable blindness of men! If we ask them, who are you? One will say, I am a nobleman holding a distinguished rank in the world; another, I am a magistrate showing forth the honourable tokens of my power; a third, I am a sovereign seated on a throne. All this may be great, but there is still something greater in you; you are immortal; that is your choicest name, and the most honourable of your titles.

the lustre of all the rest vanishes before this. You are immortal; on that title God is your first beginning; a God-man your model; virtue is your profession; grace your life; heaven your inheritance; eternity your expectation; your happiness the happiness of God himself. In this point of view your soul is more precious, than all the goods of the world; your dignity greater than that of all the kings of the earth; and the sole title of Immortal, which you carry engraved on your forehead, does you more honour, than all the diadems which adorn their heads.

In the sublimity of these sentiments, man begins to know and respect himself; he becomes fearful of dishonouring himself by the horrors of vice, of degrading himself by the slavery of his passions, of being debased by the contagion of human things. As he is immortal, he soars aloft towards heaven, he is ashamed of cleaving to the earth, like to a great king, who blushes if he chance to be surprised in actions unworthy of himself. A great sovereign should not form in his mind any projects, which are not worthy of his character; nor an immortal man admit into his heart any other, than noble desires.

The mortal man then may place his greatness in the fleeting vanities of time, but an immortal soul, which sees insignificant atoms, where the world discovers immense colossuses, will only glory in its immortality. By nourishing this noble sentiment, it sees the vain pageantry of human greatness pass away under its feet: and being thus ennobled, it has no need either to assume an air of haughtiness to appear great, or to make use of duplicity to disguise itself from the world, or to counterfeit what it is not; it only needs to renounce the delusion of its pride to be truly great. Without borrowing external embellishments, nature and religion alone adorn it sufficiently to make it great without vanity, and make it appear so without affectation; because being then raised above the world and sensible things, it becomes great with the greatness of God, wise with his wisdom, just with his justice, im-

mortal with his immortality, and, if the expression is allowable, in a manner divine with the divinity itself. Under this view man will cease to love himself, or if he loves himself, he will no longer love in himself the carnal man, the earthly man, the sensual man, but the spiritual, the immortal, and the heavenly man, whom he regards as his whole self, all the rest being nothing but a shadow, a phantom, and an outward figure of man.

2dly. The idea of immortality sanctifies all our actions by the greatness of the views, and sublimity of the motives, with which it inspires us. In effect, what are all other motives, which we can take for the rule of our actions, in comparison of that of our Immortality? No, there are no real virtues but those which are grounded on the foundation of a glorious immortality. All others may form dissemblers, hypocrites, politicians, *whited sepulchres;* Matt. xxiii. 27.—but they will never make men wise by choice, and virtuous by principle. Some say, that virtues are only disguise and dissimulation. Why so? Because the virtues, of which they speak, are limited to time, and are not raised on the firm basis of Immortality. Oftentimes justice is only a constrained and forced virtue; the hand may be pure, while the heart is stained with hidden vice. Disinterestedness is only ostentation; modesty nothing but affectation: all this happens but too often in the land of darkness. But raise man to the sublime region of Immortality, where a pure air, free from the vapours of earthly contagion, is breathed, virtue there is truth, it is uprightness, it is sincerity; the hand is innocent, and the heart without stain.

Such are virtues in general. But particularize them in each condition, each state of life, and give man Immortality for the rule of his conduct, and the first mover of his actions, in each condition, in each state you will find the truly wise Christian, the good King, the good Magistrate, the good Citizen, the good Friend, the good Father. A King, who considers himself as immortal, will regard his subjects as his children, being

persuaded, that he will one day reign, not over them, but together with them in heaven. The Magistrate will weigh his decisions in the scale of equity, because he will reflect, that he himself is to be weighed in the scale of the divine justice. The Merchant will fix probity for the base of his traffic, because he will remember, that there is a more advantageous commerce in virtue, of which he can purchase Immortality itself. The artist will work day and night if necessary, because without limiting himself to time he will turn his labour to profit for eternity: and what a misfortune for him would it be, if being obliged to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow in this world, he should appear in eternity with his hands empty? In a word, every man, who places Immortality before his eyes, will be great in all his views, just in all his projects, regular in all his steps, holy in his conduct and in all his actions. If men therefore thought of Immortality, and acted by the principles it suggests, every heart would become an asylum of virtue, all men would be living images of God; the laws, peace and justice would reign throughout the earth, and the world would become a picture of the terrestrial paradise.

If men were thoroughly penetrated with these sublime sentiments, and animated with these powerful motives, should we see, what is seen so frequently in the world, viz. men esteeming and valuing themselves only by their outward advantages, by their hoard of riches, by the elevation of their rank, by their costly apparel? Does not a soul, which values itself on such trifling considerations only, seem to forget the superior excellence of its spiritual Being, and give up the more noble end of its creation? Immortal men, let us honour virtues and not treasures; let us know how to esteem what we are, and not what we have; let us be convinced that there is nothing so great in man as man himself.

It suffices not, however, to be convinced of the greatness of our destination; the essential point is to consider, whether we support the dignity of our being

by the holiness of our sentiments and actions. And what an unhappiness for us, what a crime would it be, if after being raised so high by the bountiful hand of our Creator, we should basely degenerate from that high state, by the meanness of our sentiments and unworthy behaviour? Let us then never cease to draw plentifully from the inexhaustible fountain of Immortality such graces as it is capable supplying us with.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

The thought of Immortality well considered will furnish us with the most singular advantages: it will help to sweeten the bitterness of our present afflictions, and satisfy the full extent of our desires.

Enliven then our sentiments, O my God, raise them to thyself, transport them into the bosom of that glorious Immortality to which thou invitest us: it is above our thoughts, but it is not above our hopes.

1st. Point. Consider, that the thought of Immortality is a comfort to us in our afflictions, however great, however sensible they may be. In how many doleful occasions have we need of calling this wholesome reflection to our minds during the course of this mortal and perishable life? What, alas! is our life but an uninterrupted train of calamities and afflictions? Man, said Job, has only a short time allotted him to remain on earth, and living only this *short time he is filled with many miseries.* Job xiv. 1.—All men walk through a path strewed with crosses and thorns, and oftentimes watered with their own tears. *The life of man is* even something more than a continual *warfare:* Job vii. 1.—it is one continued series of uneasiness, troubles, weariness, disgust and bitterness; a complex of evils, a constant ebbing and flowing of changes and vicissitudes, which like so many tumultuous waves rush upon him one after another, and overwhelm him by their weight. What would be our lot, if in this deluge of evils we had nothing to comfort us in life, but life

itself? Would our eyes supply tears enough to weep, and our hearts sighs enough to groan over our misfortunes? Yet when in the midst of this miserable life, which is only a continued death, Immortality presents itself to our view, and discovers to us the inextinguishable splendour of heavenly glory, what is more capable than this prospect of alleviating the weight of our evils, and assuaging the bitterness of our sorrows? After all, what does it import us, whether during life we are happy or unhappy, rich or poor, great or little, healthful or sick, if it be still true to say, that life is only a passage for us, and Immortality the term of our destination, our inheritance and abode for ever? O my soul, being thus enlightened by these great and unchangeable truths, let us raise our thoughts on high, let us shake off all dejection of mind, and rouse our feelings to support the greatness of our evils by the greatness of our hopes. We have but a limited time to suffer: eternity will be our never-ending comfort. Now is the tedious darkness of a long night; the day of eternity must succeed; and when that great day shall once begin to dawn upon us, all the clouds will be then dispersed, all our labours will be rewarded, all our tears dried up: A blissful serenity will beam upon our minds; joy will reign in our hearts, and establish an unalterable peace within them. Let us then, my soul, not fear to suffer, if it be needful; let us weep, let us mourn on earth: We are in the vale of tears, and in a place of banishment; but let us not forget our heavenly country. If we sow in tears we shall reap in gladness. We pass, indeed, through fire and sword, but we shall come at last to a place of refreshment: Some years of trial yet, and some days of combat, but all will change and have an end. The Almighty is already, as it were, holding a crown over our head; let us cast up our eyes to heaven; Immortality will one day indemnify us for the sufferings and afflictions of this life. This then is the happy term, O my God, to which you invite us; the thought of our immortality announces to us this happiness, and prepares us for it,

2d. Point. Consider how wholesome and pleasing is the thought of immortality, which, by a new favour, comes to gratify all our desires, and complete the full extent of our wishes. The heart of man, O my God, must either be a fund of inexhaustible misery, or of unmeasurable desires, always to wish, always to seek, always to be aspiring after some new thing.

I often make this reflection, and say to myself, We sometimes condemn men for being over greedy and insatiable in their desires; but we are deceived. Men, it is true, are blameable in desiring with too much eagerness the things of this world; but they have reason not to be contented with them; they are destined to something greater, that alone can satisfy them. We see that all other beings are contented with their respective enjoyments; man alone is ever insatiable in his desires. Why? Because thou alone, O my God, art able to content him. In vain do we offer him heaps of goods, riches, the treasures of the earth; they are no more than a handful of dust, which is thrown into his eyes to hinder him from seeing his own greatness, and searching for happiness in its proper place. Thus, in spite of all the goods which are offered him, and profusely poured upon him, he still seeks, still desires, he still is breathing after something more. Were he master of the world, he would wish for new worlds to gratify his restless thirst for more.

Let us view the great men of the earth; they imagine that happiness consists in grandeur; but no sooner are they arrived at the summit of glory, than they acknowledge that all their honours are only an empty smoke. Disgusted with grandeur they turn towards riches. Behold the rich men of the world; they possess immense treasures, but in the very midst of their treasures nothing is experienced but want. Little satisfied with what they have, they desire what they have not; tired of their riches they plunge themselves into sensual pleasures. Behold them in the midst of their voluptuous pursuits; they seek for happiness in the pleasures of the senses, but these delights

soon losing their attractions, they are compelled to whet their appetite by excesses of voluptuousness, which degrade human nature and dishonour reason itself. What is all this in worldlings, O my God, but a wild despair of ever obtaining what they want? After trying every thing without success, they are forced to cry out with Solomon, *Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*—Ecclesiastes i. 2, 14.

O blessed Immortality, when wilt thou come to present us objects capable of giving us content? Long enough have we experienced, by running after lies, that all other things, so far from satisfying our wishes, have only served to irritate and inflame our desires. Blessed Immortality, with thee honours will be lasting, treasures will be immense, pleasures will be pure, yea our passions themselves through thee will be hallowed and sanctified, according to that of St. Augustine, *Let us ascend after him, even by our passions.*—Aug. Serm. 176. In this sense the disorder and irregularity of the human heart proceed only from having too narrow limits prescribed it, by being confined to the pursuit of objects little worthy of itself. Let us give the soul its full soar, let it act in all its extent, it will fly up to heaven and fix its desires on immortal and real goods; then the ambitious man will be satisfied, the covetous man will be contented, the man of pleasure will be satiated, because they will find in Immortality solid possessions and real delights.

Conclude from the foregoing considerations, 1st. Often to reflect during sickness and infirmity, that your body is not immortal, and that being destined one day to perish, it is not surprising that it should now suffer, and begin to give marks of its decay.

2dly. In temptations and passions to remember, that your soul is immortal, and that you must not degrade and dishonour it by the contagion of vice.

3dly. In prosperity, equally as in adversity, to say to yourself, that all must end, and therefore that you must not be elated by the one, or too much depressed by the other.

4thly. To fly from all discourses, and abhor all maxims which tend to depreciate the immortality of the soul: to waver in faith on this point would be exposing yourself to lose entirely the belief of it.

THE COLLOQUY.

When then, O immortal God, O King of ages, when will the ray of Immortality shine in open view? When will that beautiful day dawn upon us? When will Immortality receive us into its bosom? The happy moment will come, the beautiful day will dawn: In expectation of that desired instant, let us encourage and support ourselves with the pleasing hopes of it. Being involved in the darkness of time, let us remember, that the brightness of eternity will one day be our lot. We live on earth; let us not forget that we are made for heaven: We weep in a place of pilgrimage; our heavenly country expects us: We are yet on the tempestuous sea of this world; we shall enter at length into the secure haven. With this prospect before us, let us cheerfully forsake every earthly object; let us be easy under every trial. If crosses befall us, let us not be dejected; they soon will end. If we are in possession of earthly goods, let us not be attached to them; we must forsake all; and in quitting the world, what is it in effect that we quit? Thou alone, O eternal Being, thou alone, O glorious Immortality, canst draw my attention, fix my desires, and satiate my ambition. I devote to thee from this moment all my powers, not to profane them hereafter by prostituting them on perishable things. Being made for heaven, what is earth to me? Being destined for eternity, why am I to be busied with time? and when God calls me to Immortality, can the world detain me a single moment? O Immortality, why am I not able to raise myself at this instant above this world, where I only languish in death; and being carried by the wings of divine love, fly at once into thy bosom, to live there a true and never-ending life, even the life of God himself?

SEVENTH LESSON.

ON THE DIGNITY AND EXCELLENCE OF A CHRISTIAN.

If as a Christian, let him not be ashamed. But let him glorify God in this name.—1 Pet. iv. 16.

NOTHING is so great in the estimate of God, and in the eyes of faith, as a true Christian. Let us judge thereof by the magnificent titles with which Christianity honours him, by the holiness of the model which it sets before him, by the sublimity of the sentiments with which it inspires him, and by the greatness of the hopes which it proposes to him. Let us know by these marks what we are, or at least what we ought to be.

1st. What is a Christian? He is a disciple of Jesus Christ, enlightened with the light of faith, educated according to the bright principles of the Gospel, instructed in the unshaken truths of religion. Inestimable the grace, and glorious is the title, which we have inherited from Jesus Christ himself; which he merited for us, and bought with the price of his blood, wherein we were regenerated, at the time when we were washed with the sacred waters of baptism.

What is a Christian? A member of Jesus Christ. All Christians make but one body, of which Jesus Christ is the head, and whereof they must be the members, living the life of a God, since it is necessary that the members should live the life of their head. We are the members of Jesus Christ; we consequently become the temple of God, not only in our souls, which, by the grace of regeneration, are the throne of the Holy Ghost; but our bodies also, according to St. Paul, are the living temples of the Divine Spirit: *Know you not, that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost?* 1 Cor. vi. 19.—To all these prerogatives, let us add the titles, with which St. Peter honours all Christians, when he calls them *a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people,* 1 Pet. ii. 9.—

gloriously bought with the blood of Jesus Christ himself. What titles? What sacred characters? if Christians knew what they are, would they live as they do? or should we meet with Christians who are not saints?

2dly. Again, what is a Christian, and what ought he to be? A man formed upon the maxims of the gospel, and on the sample of Jesus Christ himself. Thus what were the first Christians formed upon this great model, and what characters did they present to the world? New men entirely unknown to the universe till that time: true sages, of whom the Pagans only knew the empty name; in them the world admired a glorious assemblage of all virtues, fidelity in their discourse, sincerity in their sentiments, uprightness in their conduct, modesty without affectation, grandeur without haughtiness, humility without baseness. They only felt they had passions to overcome them; pleasures, to sacrifice them; duties to comply with them; loving good, and knowing it only for their practice: slighting commendation, and only studying to deserve it; fearing to appear almost as much as to sin; and fearing sin more than death itself. Behold what a Christian is: his heart is the sanctuary of virtue; his mouth the interpreter of truth; his conduct a faithful expression of the life of a God-man. Such is man, if he is a perfect Christian; if he is not such, Christianity reproaches him with his weaknesses; it condemns his faults, and presses him to use his utmost endeavours not to degrade his dignity.

3dly. Let us understand the dignity of a Christian from the nobleness of sentiments with which his religion inspires him, in rendering him superior to all terrestrial objects.

It raises him above the events and vicissitudes of life. If a deluge of misfortunes pour in upon him, if his goods are torn from him, if his friends abandon him, if fortune frowns, if health forsakes him, if every thing fails, and all his possessions are ravished from him; yet his faith remaining, he has lost nothing. Stripped of every thing, he will appear greater, because he will appear great in himself, giving a spectacle to

the universe, which a pagan philosopher said was so worthy of God, viz. a good man fighting with the capricious humours of fortune.

It raises him above the world, it makes him triumph over its errors, which his faith dispels; over its pleasures, which his heart despises; over its threats, which his courage slights: what can that man fear from the world who has nothing to fear but sin?

It raises him above himself: to rise above the world is true greatness, to rise above one's self is heroism. How exceedingly great is it to see a man generously take up arms against himself, declare an implacable war against himself, keep the sword always in hand, cut away even the smallest roots of his passions, break off every rising bud of self-love, present himself a continual victim to God to be offered as a holocaust on the altar of divine love? Such is a Christian: he is not insensible what it will cost him to complete the sacrifice; but he knows what he owes to faith.

It raises him above torments, tyrants, and death: when one is inured to perpetual abnegation, little more is required to be resigned to die: and was it not this very disposition which the Pagans admired so much in the first Christians, those men who were truly worthy of that great name? What kind of men are these, they cried out? If they are accused at our tribunals, they present themselves of their own accord before us; if we condemn them to death, they return thanks as for a favour done them; if they are led to execution, they go with joy in their countenance as to a triumph. Threaten to inflict upon them all the torments that can be invented, you may do it; they reply, we are only men destined to die; but we are Christians prepared to die like saints; we have bodies which can fall, but a faith which can remain triumphant. Strike, burn, cut, destroy; you think to inflict death upon us, you only restore us to a better life; if time ends, eternity begins. What men were these? What sentiments had they? After all, they were but true Christians.

4thly. But how could these generous champions belie their character, whilst they had before them a sight of the crowns, which they expected, and were supported by the greatness of their hopes? For in this light is not the greatness of a Christian, and his pre-eminence beyond that of all others? Here let us raise our thoughts, and our sentiments: our *hope*, according to that of wisdom, *is full of* a glorious *immortality*. Wisdom iii. 4.—That is our portion, our inheritance; our lot is in the land of the living. What a glorious spectacle did that generous mother formerly give, who saw her seven sons led before her to martyrdom? The tyrant pronounced their death; the executioners stood by with all the instruments of torture, fire, sword, and every weapon, which cruelty could produce; the blood of the illustrious martyrs was pouring forth in plentiful streams under the eyes of the courageous mother; *My son*, said she, full of sentiments of faith, My darling son, *I beseech thee look upon heaven:* 2 Mac. vii. 28.—thou art securing the entrance of it to thyself, it opens its bosom to thee. The church addresses the same language to us, to raise our sentiments, and rouse the ardour of our courage: *look upon heaven;* remember, that in quality of Christians, it is your country; that the earth for you is only a place of banishment, the world a foreign land.

Our hopes raise us to heaven; let us send our hearts and wishes thither before us; let us be careful not to debase ourselves by the contagion of perishable things; let the stream of earthly enjoyments glide away beneath our feet. In quality of men we live in the world; but in quality of Christians we are not of the world: *What dost thou do in the world*, said Tertullian, *who art above the world?* What! thou a Christian, and yet cleave to the world? Thou a Christian, and takest thou part in the foolish diversions and pomps of the world? Thou a Christian, and art thou seen in the assemblies, and at the entertainments of the world? *What dost thou do in the world?* Remember, that if thou art in the world, it is only to be, either an exam-

ple to the world by thy virtues, or its condemnation by the opposition of thy morals, or a conqueror of the world by the superiority of thy sentiments : that is to say, that thou art a Christian, for no other purpose than to become a saint.

Such is the exalted grandeur, to which Christianity raises us ; but at the same time what are the indispensable obligations, which it imposes upon us?

MEDITATION.

ON THE ENGAGEMENTS AND DUTIES OF A CHRISTIAN.

Prostrate at thy feet, O my God, I come to consider my engagements to thee, and to bring myself to an account of what I am in thy eyes, or at least what I ought to be. I am a Christian ; this great thought, which is presented to me, deserves my whole attention, and should rouse all my affections. Deign to enlighten me with thy grace, to comprehend the real import of it, and to know the obligations and full extent of the duties which it imposes upon me.

1st Point. I am a Christian. Let me consider the unspeakable favour, which has been granted me by God in preference to so many others, when he made me be born of Christian parents, whilst so many others groan in the darkness of error, and in the shadow of death. I might have been born in the same like them, and like them, I might die therein. In that supposition, being estranged from the ways of salvation, I should never have come to share of the happiness of the saints ; I should have been eternally separated from God, condemned to darkness, and everlasting torments. The goodness of God has ordained otherwise in my behalf: I am in the bosom of the Church : I am numbered with its children ; I have only to listen to its voice, to follow its maxims, and walk in the road it points out to me, to be assured of walking in the road of heaven, and of arriving one day thither, if I continue steadfast in my way to the very end.

The Church has taken me, as it were, into its arms: at my birth it regenerated me with the sacred waters of baptism; all my life long it instructs, and guides me; I hope it will receive my last breath; even after death I shall still have a share of its prayers and sacrifices. What grace? what blessing? A grace so much the greater, as I neither did, nor could do any thing to deserve it. God granted it me of his own pure gratuitous goodness. A grace so much the more estimable, as it becomes to me a source of almost infinite other graces during life, and without which all others would be useless towards my arriving at heaven. A grace so much the more unutterable, as it may be to me the cause and a pledge of eternal glory in the mansions of bliss.

Be then a thousand times blessed for it, O my God, I acknowledge the greatness of the favour; it is a pure effect of thy goodness and tenderness for me. So many others would have benefited better by it and become great saints. If the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon had received the same lights, they would have lived in sackcloth and ashes. Many of the infidels and barbarians in Africa, Asia, and America, had they been born in the bosom of Christianity, would have been saints. But what, alas! has this grace effected in me, and what use have I hitherto made of it? Where are the tokens of my gratitude? Where the fruits, which I have drawn from it? Where are the Christian virtues, I have practised? Thou seest the deficiency and abuse, O my God! Thou art offended thereat, and why do I not weep for my offence in the bitterness of my heart? If this heart has been faithless and ungrateful, at least it should be sorrowful and contrite: raise this contrition in me: add this grace to so many others, lest they should prove fruitless, lest they should serve to condemn me, and instead of forming a Christian, should become the occasion of making a graceless and insensible infidel.

2d Point. I am a Christian. I bear the name, it is true, but have I the virtues of a Christian? I have

the graces annexed to the character; have I the works? What subject have I to weep in considering what a Christian ought to be, and in seeing what I am in the sight of God?

A Christian ought to be the living image of Jesus Christ: what marks of resemblance have I to him? Have I placed this divine model before my eyes? Have I graved and expressed the likeness of it in my heart?

A Christian should be detached from the world, estranged from the world, crucified to the world; and I only live for the world, I only breathe for the world. Is it being a Christian to think like the world, to act like the world, to follow in all things the ideas, the maxims, the examples of the world?

A Christian should be humble, fearing and flying from honours, loving or bearing at least patiently with contempt: I am nothing but vanity and pride, seeking to rise, to distinguish myself, to appear in the world; sensible of the least slight, of the smallest want of attention and regard to my person: is this being a true Christian?

A Christian should be mortified and dead to himself; he should embrace the rigours and austerities of penance, offer violence to himself, subdue his passions and vicious inclinations, and thereby gain continual victories over himself: I seek myself in all things, I study my own ease and convenience; I fear every thing that contradicts and molests me; I can bear with nothing painful, or if I do, it is with reluctance. Should my religion call upon me to undergo martyrdom, would it find in me a martyr or an apostate?

A Christian should be mild, patient, condescending, charitable, making himself all to all, bearing with their defects, compassionating their sufferings, excusing their faults: Alas, I find every contrary disposition in myself: peevish, impatient, sometimes angry and passionate: on another hand virulent, censorious, condemning; nourishing in my heart resentments, aversions, jealousies, and envy. In what then am I a Christian?

Have I been one hitherto? What an empty shadow and phantom of Christianity?

The life of a Christian ought to be the proof of his religion, that is, he should show himself by his life, a man entirely heavenly, living in the world as though he lived not in it, enjoying its possessions as though he enjoyed them not, having his body on the earth and his affections in heaven, being always disposed, always ready to die. Does this portrait speak my resemblance? Do such Christian sentiments exist in my heart? Does such a Christian disposition animate my thoughts? Alas! O my God, if I do not blush at my own conduct, my religion at least blushes for me. I am a Christian, and yet have but the name, and even that sacred name I dishonour, I betray, and in some sort renounce, by my conduct and evil life. Have I reflected of what I am, and of what I ought to be? Is the life of a moral pagan much different from mine? At this rate were it requisite for me to be born among Christians, only to live like an infidel and perhaps die a reprobate?

3d Point. I am a Christian, and it is in quality of a Christian that I shall one day be judged. How rigourous, how dreadful will this judgment be? When I shall be obliged to give an account of so much time which I have lost, of so many graces which I have abused, of so many duties which I have transgressed, of so many means of salvation which I have neglected, of so many sacraments which I have received, of so many edifying examples which I have had under my eyes, and which often affected me; finally, of the unspeakable grace granted me by God, when he ordained that I should be born within the fold of Christianity; what shall I be able to answer?

I fancy to myself, that Jesus Christ calls upon me at this moment, and, transporting me before his dreadful tribunal, makes me assist at the judgment of a bad Christian, and that I hear him addressing himself to him in these words of the prophet, *What is there that I ought to do to my vineyard that I have not done to it?*—

Isaiah v. 4. Come, unworthy Christian, come give an account to my justice of the favours of my mercy. Unfaithful soul, what is there, that I could do for thee, which I have not done? I made thee be born within the pale of my church; I enlightened thee with the light of faith; I loaded thee with my graces; I redeemed thee with my blood; I prepared an eternity of happiness for thee. Was all this insufficient to convince thee of my love? Was it all too little to ask for thy heart in return? What ought I to have expected from thee? Unhappy wretch! I wished to be thy Saviour, and thou obligest me to destroy thee: I created thee to make thee partner with me in my glory, and thou shalt inherit my malediction. Hurled down for ever into the deep abyss with Pagans and Idolaters, and unhappy for a whole eternity together with them; as they, and more than they, thou shalt send forth sighs of fire, and pour out tears of blood over the graces thou receivedst, and over the abuse thou madest of them; thou shalt count them over and over again, and find them without number; thou shalt regret the loss of them, but they will never more return; thou shalt call upon thy God, and thy exasperated God shall withdraw himself from thy sight. Thou wilt see indeed what he was to thee, and what thou hast been to him; he ever merciful, ever compassionate, ever good; thou always rebellious, always ungrateful, always obstinately bent on thy perdition. Neither this mercy, which prevented thee, nor heaven, which was open to thee, nor hell, with which thou wert threatened, were able to draw thee back to thy duty. Now reduced to form for ever this disconsolate, this useless, this despairing wish, thou shalt say for eternity to thyself, yea, it would have been a thousand times better for me never to have been born, never to be enlightened with the light of faith, never to have come forth to life; there would only then have been one man less in the world, and now there will be a Christian more in hell. A Christian in hell! a Christian and an enemy of God! a Christian and accursed! a Christian cast out and reprobated for ever!

O God our Saviour, God of bounty, who hast called us to the light of truth, preserve us from this misfortune, and never permit us to experience the woful horrors of it.

I know, I am sensible, that every Christian, who lives not according to the holiness of his faith, exposes himself, and will be reduced to this. Have I not myself tampered with the danger by living as I have done, by dishonouring in myself the character and name of a Christian, by contradicting my faith by my works, by often blushing to appear as a Christian, and living as if I were not one? God of mercy, have pity on my soul, receive my sighs, and deign once more to accept my repentance.

Conclude from the foregoing considerations, 1st. To honour in a special manner the Saint whose name you received in baptism, particularly by imitating his virtues.

2dly. On the day of your baptism, and occasionally through the year, to renew the solemn engagements you made at the sacred font, and to remind yourself, of the obligations you then contracted.

3dly. Often to make the sign of the cross upon yourself, with a respect suitable to the action: it is the sign of a Christian, and as it were a profession of his faith.

4thly. Frequently to beg of God the graces of living and dying a true Christian, and always to keep yourself in readiness for that last moment.

THE COLLOQUY.

It is by a special favour, O my God, that thou madest me a Christian: hitherto I have neither understood the dignity of my state, nor the holiness of my obligations; I have hardly had any thing belonging to a Christian, but the name and graces annexed to his calling; it is now full time I should think of adopting the behaviour and sentiments of a Christian: this is the important and steady resolution which I form at present, being fully determined through thy grace to preserve it inviolable to the end of my life. I know

what I engage in; I promise to bear the cross, to contemn the world, to die to myself, to fear nothing but sin, to esteem nothing but grace, to love nothing but virtue, to desire nothing but heaven, to think of nothing but eternity, that is to live as a Christian, that I may die a saint, and rise again amongst the elect. Such, O my God, are my obligations: I bind myself to them anew from this moment, and all my life long I will make it my study to comply with them faithfully, generously, and constantly. How happy should I be if I had never swerved from them!

EIGHTH LESSON.

ON MORTAL SIN.

By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death. Rom. v. 12.

Sin is called mortal or deadly, because it brings death to the soul. There are three sorts of death, which are the consequence and effect of sin; a spiritual death, a temporal death, an eternal death. A spiritual death consists in the privation of grace, and all its concomitant blessings. A temporal death consists in the miseries and afflictions of this life, and particularly in the last instant, which shall put an end to it. Eternal death consists in the damnation of the soul, after its departure from the body. Three dreadful punishments of which sin is the unhappy cause.

1st. Spiritual death is a privation of grace, and of all the attendants of grace: because this death does not work its dreadful effects perceptibly to the sinner, it will perhaps appear less terrible to him: but alas! with what mortal wounds is his soul pierced through, and to what a woful situation is it reduced? Being dead in the eyes of God, and deprived of the life of grace, it is stripped of its possessions, it is degraded from its dignities, it is forsaken by God, and given up a

prey to the gnawing worm, which tears it in pieces. My God, what miseries are these!

It is stripped, it is spoiled of the precious gifts of grace, which were its most beautiful ornament in the sight of God, and without which it appears only as an object of horror before him. It is stripped of all its acquired merits, which constituted its most valuable treasure, and without which it has nothing left but sin and the woful effects of sin. It is degraded from its dignities. To what a height of glory had it been raised by the grace of God, and the blood of Jesus Christ poured upon it? What prerogatives had it acquired? What happy liberty did it enjoy among the children of God? What holy alliances had it contracted with God himself? O how many sacred titles could the soul glory to belong to God, and boast of God's belonging to it? God was its Father, Jesus Christ its Saviour, the Holy Ghost its heavenly bridegroom, heaven its inheritance, the infinite merits of a God redeemer its treasure. But, O the dreadful havocks of sin, and of the death which it brings to the soul! in a moment one mortal sin bereaves it of all its titles, it breaks its connexions, it effaces all the marks of its glory; the great treasures which it possessed in the order of grace, are taken from it. Sin carrying death into the soul, plunges it into a more woful situation than the state of original misery from whence grace had drawn it.

It is forsaken by God. Not that God abandons it entirely; his mercy still makes him cast some looks towards it, but they are no longer looks of complacency and tender affection. He still gives it graces, but they are delivered out in weight and measure; he gives it graces, but of the common order, no more is privileged and choice graces: he gives it graces, but will the soul return to him by means of these graces? All that can be said for certain is, that it has it in its power, the rest is more than doubtful; he gives it graces, and so he did to those unfortunate sinners, of whom it was said, *Blind the hearts of this people, and*

make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they be converted, and I heal them.—Isaiah vi. 10. *Destruction is thy own, O Israel. Let Samaria perish, because she has stirred up her God to bitterness.*—Osee xiii. 9. chap. xiv. 1. *We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed: Let us forsake her.*—Jeremiah li. 9.

Finally, it is left a prey to the gnawing worm which devours it, to remorses which tear it in pieces. Here reason represents to the sinner, in spite of himself, the horror of his conduct, and the deplorable state of his heart: there conscience, by its principle of uprightness, raises an intestine and insupportable war. On another hand, religion setting before him now the image of death which threatens him, then the rigour of the judgment which he is to undergo; next opening before his eyes the eternal abyss which is prepared for him: always rousing his faith, and with his faith his alarms, it becomes his perpetual torturer, since he refuses to be the comfort of religion. All his passions, let loose, as it were by agreement, against him, rack, torture, and tyrannize over him. Unhappy man! surrounded by so many enemies he turns against himself, and rends his heart with a contrast of violent agitations. Now he rejoices in his sin, then he detests it; one while he wishes to forsake it, then he repents of his wish, revolving alternately projects of conversion and projects of sinning in his mind, till by the violence of the interior combat he experiences in some manner within himself, a fatal foretaste of the disgust, anguish and despair of a damned soul. Happy yet, if he finds salutary remorses, as his misfortune would be complete if these were lulled asleep, if the sinner were at once guilty, and at peace!

2dly. Temporal death, which is another punishment of sin, comprises all melancholy events, doleful accidents, unfortunate changes, tragical ends, and innumerable other misfortunes; for in vain do we look for any other cause of these disasters than sin, which is the most common source of them. In effect, was it not sin, which, from the earliest times, brought down

the destructive deluge upon the earth? Was it not sin which drew fire from heaven on the polluted towns of Sodom and Gomorrah, and their criminal inhabitants? Did not sin arm the hand of the destroying angel against the first-born of Egypt? Was it not sin that called forth fiery serpents in the desert? Was it not sin which opened the earth to swallow down the wicked Dathan and Abiron? And without having recourse to these distant examples, from whence proceed so many other disasters with which the world is, as it were, overwhelmed? From whence so many unforeseen and melancholy accidents? From whence so many sudden and violent deaths? From whence so many fatal and disgraceful disorders? What is it that hurries so many from amidst their feasts and entertainments into the grave? Why are these woful scenes become so common, unless it be that sins are multiplied, and the concomitant vices of intemperance are now carried to such excess? And can any one be so wilfully blind as not to see in all this the visible vengeance of God, and acknowledge the just punishment of sin?

And what would it be, if entering into the secrets of private families, we could see the dreadful scourges, with which they are often afflicted? Their fortunes ruined, their estates squandered away, lawsuits commenced, unforeseen revolutions, accumulated infirmities, health decaying, and still more intestine wranglings and dissensions? They groan under the weight of their misfortunes; they attribute them to chance, to the injustice of men, to a blind and capricious destiny; but let us acknowledge, that they have no other cause, than the sins that reign in those families, and draw down the vengeance of heaven upon them. Instead of throwing the fault upon creatures, let us confess, that the stroke is sent from the most High; and let the unhappy victims of his justice cry out aloud, that they are unfortunate, because they are culpable, and that the hand of God is raised against them because their sins have armed him with the weapons of avenging justice.

And what would it still further be, if, besides the present misfortunes and calamities, we have under our eyes, it were allowed us to look into the divine decrees, and withdraw the awful veil, which hides futurity from us? We should descry greater disasters, which yet threaten, perhaps cruel and tragical deaths, that are reserved for sinners. We should announce to one, that after having enjoyed for a time the pleasures, feasts, shows, and foolish diversions of the world, death will come upon him when he expects it least; that time for repenting will be no longer granted him, and that eternal repentance must be his lot. We should inform another, that in the flower of his age, in the bloom of youth, when every thing seems to promise a long and healthful life, death will suddenly strike him, without allowing him even time to notice the hand which gives the blow. We should behold another extended on a bed of sickness, with treacherous friends, relations, a wife or children by his side, who through a false and cruel tenderness buoy him up with a deceitful hope of recovering, till death seize him before any preparation is made for eternity. We should see another plunged into distress, and overwhelmed with the weight of his crimes, crying out for a minister of the church, the moment he finds the deadly weapon struck into his heart, and, by a just, but terrible judgment of God, no priest to be found, or coming too late, after the sinner with every mark of reprobation has unhappily expired. We should behold another racked with the most dreadful pangs of despair, into which the sight of his past crimes, and the nigh approach of his God, coming to him not as a bountiful Saviour, but as an exasperated judge, has thrown him at the last moment: ah! that sinner will say to himself: My sins are too great, there is no mercy for me. I am a lost soul. Thus having a crucifix in his hand, and pressing the sacred image of his dying Saviour to his lips, he will depart with remorse and despair in his heart; the fatal moment is come, his life is at an end. The breathless body extended

on the bed is now no more than a corpse, and his soul has already appeared with its sins before God. Then commences the third species of death, the most dreadful of all the rest, the everlasting punishment of sin.

3dly. Contemplate then this unfortunate soul removed for ever from the sight of God, separated from God, accursed by God, hurried into the deep abyss; plunged into devouring flames, covered with hideous darkness, torn in pieces by the gnawing worm of remorse, weeping for ever, though weeping in vain, drenched with everlasting bitterness and gall, an endless victim of the insatiable wrath of God, without the least glimmering ray of comfort or redress; because sin will live and subsist for ever in that soul, and raise its unrelenting cries to God, to hurl down eternal vengeance on it. O sin! O dreadful death of sin.

But alas! are these great, these terrible truths, to many of those, who are now reading or hearing them, only simple threats? How many of these persons are perhaps destined to a speedy death! How many to a sudden death? How many will finish their course without any preparation, without repentance, without receiving the last sacraments, or what is worse, by receiving them in an unworthy manner accompanied with stings of conscience, and followed by eternal reprobation? How many will perhaps conclude their days amidst the extravagances of a wild presumption, or in a woful, and voluntary impenitence, or in a still more deplorable despair? What a lot? what misery? Yet we stand unconcerned, we remain thoughtless of it; whilst perhaps at this very moment the dreadful decree is passing against us? perhaps God has already cut us off, and destined us to punishment; perhaps in a little time he will command the stroke to be struck; and we are still running after the amusements and foolish pleasures of the world, and live peaceably in sin. Is our conduct folly, is it blindness, or is it a renunciation of our faith?

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

To form a just idea of mortal sin, let us consider it under four different points of view, or rather on the four great stages of the divine vengeance; viz. in the rebel Angels in heaven, in our first Parents in the terrestrial paradise, in the number of damned souls in hell, and, above all, in Jesus Christ on Calvary: for in beholding the dreadful punishments, to which God condemns either sin, or the sole appearance of sin, we shall more easily understand the infinite hatred he has of it, and more clearly see the frightful horrors we expose ourselves to by committing and persevering in it.

My God, enlighten my understanding, and touch my heart: I particularly here stand in need of the assistance of thy grace, that I may learn to detest the only enemy I have to fear in this world.

1st. Point. The first stage of divine vengeance, and the first victim of sin, were the rebel Angels in heaven. With what dread am I penetrated in beholding their punishment? They rise in rebellion against God, and in the very instant they undergo the punishment of their rebellion. The sword of the Almighty is lifted up against them; they are driven from his presence, banished for ever from heaven, hurled into the depth of a miserable eternity: from angels, sin changes them into devils.

Dreadful and striking reflection for me, when I compare my sins with that of the fallen angels! They committed but one sin, and that a sin of thought, a momentary sin; and I, O my God, have committed numberless sins, heinous sins, and have repeated the commission of them beyond my comprehension. The angels had not a moment allowed them to rise from their sin; the same instant, which saw them guilty, beheld them unhappy: whereas, after my great and frequent sins, God has granted me time to enter into

myself; grace has often inspired me to do it; conscience has not ceased to admonish me; and notwithstanding all I have been slothful, I have delayed, I perhaps still groan under the weight of sin. Ah, Lord, is not this unhappy continuance in sin still a greater sin, than the first I committed? It seems in some sense, O my God, that your goodness suffered violence in destroying so perfect a creature as an angel the moment he came forth from your hands. If nevertheless you sacrificed a rebel angel to your justice, what vengeance will you not pour forth on sinful man?

2d. Point. The second instance of the divine vengeance upon sin is seen in our first parents in the terrestrial paradise. Man, scarcely brought forth from nothing by creation, plunges himself into a more horrible abyss by sin. His crime is immediately followed by his condemnation and misery; he is driven out of paradise, stripped of his supernatural endowments, sentenced to a long and painful penance for life, and finally reduced again to dust by the stroke of death; nor was this the end; it was but the beginning of his punishment. Adam by his sin incurred the indignation of an offended God; but it was not on him alone, that the divine anger is discharged; all his posterity is involved in the same fatal decree, and loaded with the same evils.

Here, O my soul, let us trace, if we can, a faithful picture of the miseries that oppress the human race; let us collect together in mind the calamities, which have ever fallen upon the universe, hunger, thirst, sickness, troubles, wars, plague, famine, and all the scourges of heaven; and let us say: behold these are the effects of sin, these are the fatal shoots of that accursed root. Without sin there never would have been any miseries in the world.

But let us proceed further: let us descend in thought into the tombs of the dead, and turn over the remains of those who lie buried in them, those frightful heaps of withered bones, the dust and ashes, to which the bodies are reduced, the filth and worms which they

have engendered; and in deep consternation let us again cry out; behold the effects of sin; without sin there would neither have been withered bones nor nauseous heaps of corruption. O my God, how hideous a thing must sin be, how poisonous the source, from whence such dreadful evils flow?

What is still more terrible, O great, O just God, is, that thy wrath, which has been armed against us by sin for nigh six thousand years, is not yet appeased; thy vengeful hand is still lifted up against us; the fatal spark has raised a conflagration, which will not be brought under but by the extinction of the whole human race. As long as a drop of the blood of Adam remains upon earth, that blood must necessarily be purified by the fire of thy anger; and this chastising fire will not cease on earth but to be kindled with more fury in hell, and to pursue implacably the unhappy remains of this guilty generation. My God, how dreadful is thy justice, and how terrible must sin be in thy eyes?

3d Point. The third stage of divine vengeance represents a still more frightful spectacle in the millions of unhappy souls that are now burning, and shall ever burn, in hell. Let us for a moment go in thought to the mouth of that abode of wrath, and, standing on the brink of the yawning abyss, which continually disgorges flame and fire, let us form to ourselves an idea of sin and of the horrors of it: let us contemplate those terrible gulfs which sin has dug for its own punishment; those torturing and devouring flames which sin has enkindled by the breath of an angry God; that hideous darkness which, however frightful, yet falls short in its horror of that which sin spreads over the soul; the unhappy victims themselves which sin has ingulfed in the dreadful abyss; let us hear their sighs, their groans, their lamentable howlings of despair, which sin forces from their mouths. Then going down in spirit into the depth itself, let us conceive a new horror of sin; let us view it through the melancholy gloom and thick darkness with which it is surrounded: how

ever awful it be, it will still send forth piercing rays of light to make us know and detest sin. Under this frightful representation, can it fail of rousing all the hatred and execration of our hearts, seeing that it deserves all the vengeance and anathemas of an angered God ?

4th Point. But forgetting, if possible, all that we have hitherto meditated upon, let us pass on to the fourth stage of the divine vengeance, and view on Calvary a more shocking scene than all the rest. Thither we are called by a Saviour and dying God : placing ourselves therefore at the foot of his cross, let us contemplate the bloody spectacle which faith presents to us : the arm of the Almighty is lifted up ; the decree is passed against the Holy of Holies ; the victim is fastened to the cross; the blood of the Lamb trickles down in streams on the earth ; the Son of God himself expires on a cross. Behold the state to which our sins, which he had charged on himself, have reduced him.

A circumstance particularly striking in this tragical scene is, that Jesus Christ bore no more than the appearance of sin in himself, and yet this sole appearance of sin was sufficient to make him in a manner guilty in the eyes of God, and as such to sentence him to death: and what still raises our astonishment higher is, that nothing less than the merits and death of a God was requisite to expiate sin. No, all the virtues of the saints, all the holiness of the just, all the torments of the martyrs, even all the merits of the Queen of Angels and Saints herself, were not sufficient to atone for one sin. But the most to be lamented is, that the death of this God has not yet worked sufficiently upon our hearts to withdraw them from sin. O my adorable Saviour, by your death you caused the sun to be eclipsed, you caused the foundations of the earth to tremble, you caused the graves to be opened, you caused the rocks to split asunder ; and our hearts, more hardened than those rocks remain insensible, and refuse to bewail the horror of sin, which raised you upon your cross, which spilled your blood, which occasioned your death. Shall this heart still be insensible of what sin is ? No, my God, it shall give

itself up to the bitterness of its sorrows in bemoaning the dreadful effects of it.

It seems, O my God, that to know, to bewail, and to detest sin, we have neither need of reasoning nor argumentation. I cast myself at the foot of your cross, I raise my eyes towards it, and, at the sight of the moving spectacle it presents me with, I am forced to cry out, Behold the effects of sin. That venerable head, hanging down, is sunk by the weight of the criminal thoughts which have possessed my mind; those eyes drowned in tears fly from the sight of the unchaste objects which have delighted my eyes; that heart plunged in sorrow, and pierced through with a lance, is wounded by the sinful desires which my heart has conceived.

Alas! how bad is the use we make of our tears? We weep and lament for the misfortunes of this life, and we shut our eyes on the more deplorable misfortunes of the next. If a man suffers the loss of some of his temporal goods, he is distracted with grief; if he loses the goods of eternity, he is insensible of his loss; if a wife is deprived of a husband who was dear to her, she passes her life in weeping and mourning; a wound is opened in her heart that bleeds always afresh with pain at the sad remembrance; if a soul is deprived of its heavenly spouse by sin, its misfortune touches her not. If a courtier has forfeited the good graces of his prince, he is inconsolable, and life becomes burdensome to him: he has offended his God, the best of masters; he has fallen into his disgrace, and not a sigh is formed, not a tear shed by him.

O deplorable blindness of men, thus to weep for the loss of temporal goods, and not weep for the loss of their souls; to weep for earth, and not weep for heaven; to shed for the concerns of this world fruitless, and yet bitter tears, and to remain insensible to the concerns of salvation, and eternity itself! Are we Christians? Is our faith dead? Do we believe an eternity? O sin, how dreadful is thy darkness, how great thy blindness, and yet how terrible the punishments which are reserved for thee? How lasting, and how bitter will

be the regret and despair which thou wilt cause. Eternity itself will not suffice to dry up the source of them.

Behold then, O my God, the resolutions I form at the foot of thy cross, and at the sight of sin, which has occasioned thy death : fix them forever immoveably in my heart.

1st. I resolve to entertain feelings of sorrow, lamentation, and regret, at the sight of my sins, and of the trespasses of my past life: *Who will give water to my head and a fountain of tears to my eyes?* Jer. ix. 1.—O that it were in my power to wash them away with my blood!

2dly. Sentiments of a wholesome fear and dread on account of the danger and occasions of sin. Let us fly with fear and precipitation from the sight of sin, *as from the face of a serpent.* Ecclus. xxi. 2.

3dly. Sentiments of thanksgiving and acknowledgement to Thee for not having struck me dead, and snatched me out of life in the state of sin : if God had called upon me at such a time, after such an action, what would have been my lot, how great my unhappiness ?

4thly. Sentiments of compassion for those who have the misfortune of being in the state of sin : perhaps my nearest friends and relations are in that dismal state : if I were to see them fall dead at my feet, I should weep over them ; the death of sin is still more woful and deplorable.

THE COLLOQUY.

My God, preserve me from sin, it is the only misfortune I dread ; but if I have the unhappiness to sin, punish, afflict me in this world ; take thy vengeance here on earth ; shower down upon me the sharpest scourges of thy wrath in this life, providing thou reserve mercy for me in the next. The particular grace which I ask of thee above all others is, if thou foreseest, that, by continuing life I shall have the unhappiness of offending thee, and of falling into sin, that thou wilt take me out of life before the misfortune happens

to me. I had rather cease to live, than live in thy disgrace : I had rather undergo a thousand deaths, than displease thee one instant by the death which sin brings to the soul. Let me then not live but to bewail my sins, to appease thy wrath, and to implore thy great mercy.

NINTH LESSON.

ON DEATH.

It is appointed for men once to die.—Heb. ix. 27.

The most important affair of our life is to prepare for death, and the best means of preparing for it is often to call to mind and meditate on the thought of death. From the midst of that darkness in which death is involved, the most resplendent light will come forth. Behold the truths which death presents to our consideration.

1st. We are doomed to die : the unchangeable decree is passed against us ; every day sees it put in execution on some one or other of the children of Adam. At this very moment, whilst I am meditating on death, some one in the world is giving up the ghost and entering upon eternity. Perhaps I myself am the person who is to follow next. Are these truths thought of ? The whole earth is only a vast stage, which is always covered with some new dead body, and a deep gulf which opens its mouth to swallow them immediately up : but notwithstanding this decree being passed against us, who of us is there who gives himself time to attend to it, to meditate, and think seriously of it ? Mortal men, and always dying, we yet live as if we never were to die ; we set the thought of death at a distance from us, as if by removing it from our mind, we could escape the effectual horrors of it. Thus we live in a forgetfulness of all, whilst we have every thing to fear, like those unfortunate victims, which are led to the altar without conceiving the least fear of the death

which threatens them, till they feel the stroke that puts an end to their existence.

2dly. We are all doomed to die. Formed of the same clay, we all tend to the same end; death will cite us all to its tribunal, and call us all over by our names; on such a day thou shalt die, thou on such another; thou this year, thou the following; thou to-morrow, thou perhaps to-day. In a certain number of years towns will be peopled with new men; houses will have new inhabitants; the world will be a new world; and the then possessors of it will say what we say at present; we shall all die. Men will come and meditate over our tombs; they will make the same reflections upon us, which we now make upon others: but will they make them with greater fruit? Will they by reflecting become better Christians? Probably it will be with them as it is with us. They will hear these truths and be affected by them; they will form purposes and resolutions, after which they will retire from their meditations, and lose themselves again in dissipation: New ideas will blot out the former wholesome impressions, and when death shall come they will be equally surprised by it as if they had never heard it spoken of during their life.

3dly. Death will frustrate all our schemes, and overturn all our projects: in effect, the chief inclination we have is to bewilder ourselves in schemes and systems. We form one project; another follows the heels of the first; a third presently succeeds, and so on till death comes and scatters them all in an instant. That young man in the flower of his age has his imagination filled with nothing but the thought of pleasure and amusements; he sees an immense career open before him; death lets him advance some steps, and falling suddenly upon him, stops him almost at the beginning of his course, and by some unforeseen, perhaps some tragical end, spreads consternation amongst all those of his age, who are alarmed to hear the melancholy news that such a one is dead, when perhaps they were thinking to enjoy a party of pleasure with him. And

thou, worldly beauty, wholly wrapped up in thyself, in the world, in its empty pageantry and dress, what art thou doing? Thou art adorning the victim which death will incessantly slay: thou art admiring thyself in the glass which thy vanity sets before thee, and thou perceiveth not death standing behind thee ready to strike the fatal blow: the pointed dart is already lifted up, and only waits the moment that thou art dressed out for the sacrifice; in the midst of all thy worldly vanity and pomp thou wilt fall trembling and throbbing to the ground.

Senseless mortals, how great is our blindness? We are convinced that life is no more than a morning vapour, and on so frail a foundation we pretend to raise immense edifices. We carry our views far beyond ourselves, beyond our reach, and we perceive not the grave which is opening under our feet. Alas! do we form projects only to see them overturned? Do we ingraft the tender sucker only to see it cut off the moment it begins to shoot? We amuse ourselves with deceitful fancies, with chimerical objects; all our life passes in projects, and when summoned to quit the world, we shall still have temporary schemes, plans, and systems in hand. What preparation is this for eternity?

4thly. Death will strip us of all things: we must quit all, honours, riches, pleasures, preferments, employs, friends, connexions. Every man will be reduced to the state in which the prophet Job was, and will be able to cry out with him, of all the things which I possessed on earth *only the grave remaineth for me.* Job xvii. 1.—As to all the rest, he will be forced to say and repeat over and over again these melancholy and doleful words, *I leave, I leave*—rather let him say, *they tear, they snatch all from me.* We must forsake all without delay, forsake all without reserve, forsake all without hopes of recovery. A bier and grave, worms and ashes, are all that will remain with us. Senseless men! was it then necessary for this to form so many desires and so many projects in our hearts, to create such

troubles, such anxieties in families, to kindle up so many wars in the state, to fight so many battles, to shed so much blood, to ravage and lay waste provinces and nations? Where were all these things destined one day to end? Or, rather, in what a fathomless abyss was it decreed, that all should be swallowed up for ever?

5thly. Finally, death will decide our lot for ever. The tree will fall one day, and it will fall either to the right or to the left, according as it shall have taken its bent during life. Behold an emblem of ourselves. We shall continue to be either the friends or foes of God, as death shall find us at the moment we cease to live. If we die in the state of grace, our lot is fixed; we shall be happy for ever. If we die in the state of deadly sin, our unhappiness is certain, and certain never to end. Death is but a single moment, and this fatal moment decides an eternity. O moment, O dreadful moment, who can poise thy weight? Who can measure thy duration? Who can weigh thy terrible consequences?

O Death, said the prophet, *thy sentence is welcome.* Ecclus. xli. 3.—How just is thy scale, how solid thy judgment, how wholesome thy councils? In effect, who is there who can attentively consider these great truths and resist the energy of them? Where is the man, who, if he seriously thought that he is to die, could be so foolishly attached to life? Who would entertain himself with vain projects, fancies, and illusions, if he listened to the voice of death, which cries out to him, that all is emptiness and vanity? Who would be so unadvisedly wedded to earthly treasures, which must soon moulder away, if he saw the danger of being deprived of the treasures of heaven that are prepared for him? On the contrary, who would not say to himself, since it is fixed that I am one day to die, and leave all, why shall I not prepare myself for death by drawing off my affections at present from all? We should then look upon each day as if it were to be our last. We should perform each action as if it might

be the last of our life. We should approach to the holy tribunal of penance, as if we were going before the tribunal of God himself. We should receive the Holy of Holies in the Blessed Sacrament, as if we were receiving our viaticum for eternity; and as life in reality is no more than a continued death, our whole life would be only a continual preparation for death. Thus we should try to live the life of the just, to die the death of saints, and to live for ever the life of the Elect. *Let my soul die the death of the just.* Numbers xxiii. 10

MEDITATION.

On these words of St. Paul,—I DIE DAILY. 1 Cor. xv. 31.

How many important truths are comprised in these two great words? How many anticipated deaths must prepare the road for that last, that absolute death, which one day will put an end to our career?

O God of life, since it is fixed that I am one day to die, grant that my whole life may be a continual preparation for death. You admonish me yourself to be always in readiness, because I know not the day, nor the hour, and death may come to seize upon me at any hour.

1st. I die every day. Alas! to how many things am I already dead? Am I not dead to all the years of my past life? They are slipped away; they are past like a dream; they are past never more to return. The remaining part of my days will glide away in the ame insensible manner: I advance in my career, and see myself daily dying without paying any attention it; I shall find myself at my last hour almost with- t having thought of it, and without perceiving where m.

2dly. I die every day, and every day I lose some part of my being, and of what makes up the course of my life. I feel that all decays little by little; my mind is weakened, my memory shortened, my eyes grow dim, my strength diminishes, the whole machine

fails and threatens destruction: all these symptoms are so many harbingers of death, or rather so many deaths in retail, which prepare the way for the last sacrifice, and never permit me to lose sight of it.

3dly. I die every day: I have already made a great part of my journey, uncertain how much still remains. I live to-day, to-morrow is not mine. I breathe in the present moment, the next I cannot be sure of. Is not this continual uncertainty of life itself a kind of death? In such a situation what can engage our attention? What views can we have? What systems, what projects can we form? I form but one, which is to think of death, to prepare for death, and to hold myself in constant readiness for it. When the last moment comes it will be too late to do it.

4thly. I die every day to all that passes, to all that happens to me, whether afflicting or comfortable. Does not time, which consumes every thing, take away with it indifferently blessings and evils? What is there constant and durable in the world? When we are in troubles, let us say, they will soon end; why should we be so afflicted at them? When we enjoy consolations, let us say to-morrow perhaps they will not be ours, why should we set our heart upon them? What folly to stick to what in a short time, in spite of me, will be no more? And what greater instance of wisdom, than not to build on what has no solid foundation? God is unchangeable, and the only lasting good; it is to this, O my soul, and to this alone, that thou must adhere; death never can take it from thee.

5thly. I die every day, that is, I break asunder every day some of the chains which fasten me to life. What anguish and violence are felt, when death finds us bound with a thousand ties of temporal goods, honours, relations, friends, projects, expectances, and these bonds must be suddenly broken? To prevent the shock of this sudden violence I freely divest myself every day of something, doing before hand, as far as in me lies, the work of death; to the end that when it comes, it may find nothing more to do in me than

barely to separate my soul from my body, and return it peaceably into the hands of its Creator.

6thly. I die every day, in as much as I consider myself as already dead. A soul, which is determined to live no longer but for God alone, must share no more of the life of the world than the dead, who are already shut up in their graves. To such a soul neither pleasure, nor honour, or interest have any further charms. If it is trampled under foot like the bodies of the dead, it will utter no complaint, it will appear insensible. The heart becomes as it were dead to all, that has not power to affect it.

7thly. I die every day: Ah! how can I desire to remain any longer in this world? What can I wish to enjoy, and what can I regret leaving in it? Is not the number of my sins already great enough? Is not the account I have to render already sufficiently rigourous? O my God, I have but too much abused your graces, too much abused the days and time, which you have allotted me. Happy should I have been, if I had died at such a time, when I was better disposed to appear at your tribunal: and after all, if I still live longer, must I not come to that term at last with yet greater difficulty, with more sins, and more dread? Is death, because it is deferred, less a death? A thousand years, O my God, are in your eyes as yesterday, which is no more, or as if it never had been, nothing remains of it but anguish and regret.

8thly. I die every day: happy if I can at length complete my course in your grace, finish my days in your holy love, die at last the death of the just! I wish to live no longer but for that; I only aspire to that happy term. Henceforward I will devote my whole self, give all my attention to this great work which demands all my time; I will daily and continu ally die to myself, and to all things.

What peace, O my soul, what profound calm will these dispositions procure? How pleasing will death be, if thou thus disposeth thyself to it, and if thou canst say sincerely with the Apostle, *I die daily.* Yes, every

day I understand more and more the nothingness of the world; every day I divest myself of creatures; every day I break asunder some of the ties of my heart: every day I encounter some vice or imperfection; every day I endeavour to die to something, and desire to die to all. What a happy life is this continual death? How holy? How meritorious? How acceptable to God? How well does it prepare us for that absolute death, which we must one day undergo? How effectually does it dispose us to that lasting and immortal life, we hope for? Let us die every day the death of Saints, that we may one day live the life of the Elect.

To die or suffer, was the motto of the great St. Theresa. *Not to die but suffer*, that of St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi. Let us wish to unite the two together, suffer and die, live and die in sufferings.

It is true, O my Soul, this continual death is painful and irksome to nature. We do not die without difficulty, and without feeling the effects of our separation; but let us arm ourselves with a holy trust, let us rouse our courage and resolution. It is for God, that we die every day; it is to live eternally, that we die every day; it is in union with the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that we offer up our death and sacrifice. After all, however long, however painful, however afflicting this daily death may be, Grace will sweeten the bitterness of it; Hope will temper its rigour, Heaven will reward our sufferings.

Conclude from the foregoing considerations, 1st, daily to offer up the sacrifice of your life to God.

2dly. To look upon sickness and infirmities, which are sent you, as so many wholesome admonitions and means to prepare you for death.

3dly. To unite the sacrifice of your life to that of Jesus Christ on the cross.

4thly. To approach frequently to the Sacraments, that you may not at any time be taken unprepared for death.

5thly. To look upon each day as what may be your last.

6thly. To remember that, in quality of a Christian, you must be dead to the world and all things.

THE COLLOQUY.

It is true then, O my God, that the death, which is reserved for me at the end of my days, is not the only one which I must undergo. Every day I experience a death, which is the beginning and forerunner of that total death which will finish my career. Alas! we are accustomed to say, we shall die one day, and we do not see that we are dying every instant. We fancy that we live, and we are constantly dying; death is doing its work every day in us, and we do not think of completing the work of God in ourselves.

Thou, who art the true life, accept from this moment the homage which I offer thee of my days; live thou in me; detach me from every thing that must end; present, without ceasing, before my eyes that death which at each instant robs me of some part of my existence. I die every day; why should I be attached to the world? I die every day; why should I not every day prepare myself for death? One day it will be said of me, he is dead. I ought to say to myself, I die every moment; and since I insensibly lose this mortal life, which is withdrawn from me, make me worthy of that unchangeable life which thou hast destined for me.

TENTH LESSON.

ON THE PARTICULAR JUDGMENT OF A SINNER.

Thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the just judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works.—Rom. ii. 5, 6.

The particular judgment is, that which passes at the moment of our death; for before the last day, the great day of vengeance, when all men will be summoned to

the valley of Josaphat to appear in a general judgment for the public and solemn justification of Providence, there will be another particular and personal judgment passed on each of us, as soon as we depart out of life.

A judgment less terrible in appearance, because it will be without show, without pomp and solemnity; but in reality a judgment more dreadful in its effects, as it will decide the eternal lot of each of us, and because the general judgment will only be a declaration of this particular one, which has gone before.

Thus after the short space of a few years, which have glided away upon earth, after a life oftentimes spent in vanity and idle amusements, sometimes in disorder and criminal excesses; after an illness perhaps long and tedious, perhaps short, and of a few days; after the troubles, agitations, and agonies of the last conflict, the decisive moment will at length come, when we shall finish our course, and it will be said of us, as we ourselves have said of so many others, *he is dead.* Some tears, either real or feigned, some sighs, either from regard or decency, will attend the corpse of the deceased, which must soon be hurried away from the eyes of the affrighted living, who cannot bear the sight of it.

Let us, however, in spirit attend the soul, which is just separated from the body: behold it entered into eternity, transported into the awful region of the dead. What astonishment seizes it at this moment on its commencement of its new career! Alone, frightened, aghast, and, as it were, invested with the sovereign majesty of God, it finds itself at once abandoned, by every thing but its own works.

Abandoned by the world and creatures: its friends, its relations, its patrons, all that held it most dear in the world, followed it thus far, but at the entrance of this strange land, on the brink of this region of darkness, all forsake it. Where are now those arms of flesh, those enchanting objects, that treacherous idol of worldly vanity? Alas! the soul sacrificed to them

during life its treasures, its ease, its salvation! at this moment they all vanish, and the soul remains alone with its works, and its sorrowful regrets.

Abandoned by its own conscience, I mean that false erroneous conscience which seduced and blinded it during life, but which, being now changed into an upright conscience, and roused from its lethargy and its mistakes, gives the sinner up to himself, to his regrets, and to his unhappiness.

These losses are terrible: but there is another still far more severe and more distressing. Abandoned by its God, that is to say, by that God heretofore so bountiful, so tender, so merciful, and in whom it now finds only a God of justice, a God of wrath, a God of revenge. He now becomes the great God of terror, the God of armies, who strips himself of the tender name of Father, to take that of an angered Judge, and of an implacable Enemy.

Let us then represent to ourselves the terrible situation of a sinful soul in this alarming moment. Behold it at the departure from its body transported in an instant before the tribunal of its Judge; standing alone with God alone; heaven on one side, hell on the other; the judgment seat of God between the two; and the soul itself in suspense, trembling at the feet of its Judge, and in the awful expectation of its eternal doom. What objects will then present themselves to this affrighted soul? The gloomy portrait of all its life, from the first use of reason to its last breath will be set before it: all its thoughts, all its words, all its actions, all its sins will enter into judgment against it. What hidden sentiments will then be discovered? What objects heretofore unknown will be then seen? What illusions, what false principles? What mysteries of iniquity? What excesses?

Nor are we to suppose, that any long time will be requisite to make this discussion, and decide the everlasting lot of this guilty soul. An instant will determine the whole for eternity: yes, at the moment in which the soul quits the body, it finds its God, he pre-

sents himself before it, but it is only in the quality of judge; viz. at this very instant the divine light darts its rays on the soul, and the soul at once sees therein, as in a resplendent mirror, its sins, its sentence, its eternal lot. It sees its sins, their number, their circumstances, their enormity, their continuance: it sees the sentence it deserves, it reads it with its own eyes; it sees the justice, the motives, the extent of it; it sees, that its doom is fixed for eternity, unchangeable, and thereby necessarily fraught with despair. It is over, says the sovereign Judge to it, thou art judged, thou are cast off, I reject thee, I accurse thee, I remove thee from my presence for ever; my eyes and heart are shut against thee; thou shalt see no more. At the same instant the ministers of divine vengeance seize on the victim; they hurry it into that place of horror, where torments will be its inheritance for ever.

Alas, my God, it is but a moment since this soul quitted its earthly dwelling; its body is as yet extended on the bed of sorrow, and retains still a residue of its natural heat; the weeping friends surround it in mournful silence! they sprinkle it with their tears; they look upon it with fright, and retire filled with consternation: No, the body is not yet deposited in the earth, and the soul is already buried in hell.

O holy Church, thou clothest thyself in mournful apparel at the loss of thy children; uncertain of their lot, thou prayest for them; thou invitest the faithful by doleful sounds to unite their prayers in their behalf: thou sendest forth thy Ministers to offer up the sacrifice of the living and the dead.

But hold—let all supplications cease; ye Ministers of the living God forbear; your prayers are now too late. With dismal peals may the doleful bells call forth your tears on this unhappy soul; but prayers, supplication, sacrifice, are of no avail; it is lost without redress; the time of mercy is past; the reign of justice begins, never to end.

Such then are the fatal consequences of the dreadful judgment that is passed against this soul: The eternal

malediction of God is poured out upon it; hideous torments begin to eternize its wo; frightful despair sets the seals to all its misery. Behold, I say, this soul smitten by God, accursed by God, driven for ever from the presence of God. No, it shall never see God, it shall never be reunited to the Author of its being: A gloomy darkness shall intercept for ever the sight of God from its eyes; it will send forth sighs, and they will be rejected; it will raise hideous cries, and they will never be heard; and He, who by his presence should have insured the happiness of this soul, by his absence and privation will make its unhappiness for ever.

How terrible and distressing will the anguish of this soul be, when it finds that it might have been happy, and sees itself condemned to misery without the least allay of comfort, without hope, for ever without redress? But the work is done; judgment is passed upon it, its doom is fixed, its misery is complete, the eternal abyss opens to swallow it up: An immense chaos is drawn over the abyss, and on the mouth of it, thus closed up, God writes in letters of fire, these awful words, Eternity, Eternity, Eternity.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

I KNOW, O my God, that as this soul, so I myself shall be arraigned one day at thy judgment seat, and that at the moment of my death I shall be called upon to render Thee an account of my whole life, and receive the settlement of my eternal doom. I will now dispose myself for it, alone with Thee alone, as I shall then be; prostrate at the foot of thy cross, as I shall then be at the foot of thy Tribunal; I will judge myself, or rather will present myself before Thee, as my sovereign Judge, and learn upon what I shall one day be judged.

Be thou my strength and support, O my God! I ask of Thee at this moment, all the light that can enlight-

en my understanding, all the sorrow, which ought to pierce and mollify my heart, all the graces requisite to prepare me for that dreadful judgment, and to prevent the severity of it.

The sovereign Judge being then seated on his throne, the soul trembling and affrighted at the foot of his tribunal, in the awful expectation of its eternal doom, God opens the book of life and death before it, and the dreadful judgment begins. Behold here, O my soul, what will be the subject of it: behold the seven chief heads, upon which we shall be examined, and to which we all must answer. Let us prepare ourselves for them; the determination of our eternity depends thereon.

1st. A severe scrutiny will be made of the sins of which we have been guilty: sins of thought, word, deed, and omission; sins of different kinds, with all their various circumstances; sins perhaps hidden at the tribunal of penance through a false shame, which shut up our mouth in spite of the remorses which haunted our affrighted Conscience; sins dissembled, only declared by halves, palliated and excused, whilst we were sensible, that our soul was acting a double part, and our heart was not at rest; sins forgotten but perhaps wilfully so, because the moment they came to our mind, we rejected them as importunate thoughts, which interrupted the course of our pleasures, and roused remorse. What monsters of iniquity hitherto hidden, will then be exposed to open day?

Perhaps during my lifetime I made it my business to conceal and excuse my sins. God will then present them to me in all their enormity. Alas! however grievous they were, if I had repented of them, they would have been pardoned; but if they remained in me till death, they will subsist the whole length of eternity to render it eternally miserable to me.

2dly. There will be a rigourous examination of the sins which we caused others to commit. What shall we have to answer to God for so many evil advices, so much bad example, so many occasions given to the

offence of God, and loss of souls; for those free and licentious discourses which we entertained; for those hurtful books which we handed about; for those soft and indecent songs which we sung, or commanded to be sung; for those worldly and immodest dresses, those impious scoffs upon religion and its holy observances? We must be responsible for all the evil occasioned hereby. How many perhaps will be more guilty in the eyes of God for the crimes they made others commit, than for those which they committed themselves.

O my God, was not the heavy weight of my own sins sufficiently burdensome without charging myself with those of others? Such however will be the judgment which you will make me undergo, and the account which you will demand of me.

3dly. There will be a terrible discussion made of the sins which we did not hinder others from committing, being obliged thereunto. In a thousand occasions we might and ought to have prevented sin. We were charged with the edification of others, with the maintaining of regular discipline; we neglected it. We saw this man filled with rancour and bitterness; a little word would have soothed him, we omitted the wholesome correction. We were entrusted with the education of that other; we left him to the bent of his evil inclinations; we shall answer blood for blood, soul for soul. We heard detraction rend our neighbour's character, impiety and irreligion dispense their baneful maxims; a weak regard for men closed our mouth: this silence itself is criminal, often scandalous, sometimes a prevarication and kind of apostasy from faith. How many persons, besides the dreadful burden of their own sins, will be charged by God with the heavenly weight of those which they ought to have hindered in others?

Have I nothing to reproach myself with in this regard? God will judge thereof not any longer in his mercy, but in the inexorable rigour of his justice; and what shall I be able to answer, if my conscience bears witness against me?

4thly. There will be a dreadful account demanded of the good which we have not done. I hear the apostle St. James declaring, *To him who knows to do good, and does it not, it is sin.* James iv. 17.—How much good might we have done, and we neglected it? The ministers of God were announcing his word; did we attend to them? They were offering up the divine sacrifice; did we assist at it? They were inculcating a frequent use of the sacraments; did we follow their instructions? The cries of indigence and want reached our ears, did we open to their necessities a feeling heart and a beneficent hand? Did we solace the sick in their infirmities? Did we administer comfort to the afflicted in their distresses? Did we pay attendance to prisoners in their captivity? How many live in a presumptuous assurance, because they have not committed great crimes, whilst they ought to tremble for not having practised great virtues, having had so many opportunities of doing it. O my soul! Pray, tremble: judge thyself now, and wait not till God calls thee to judgment, from whence there will be no appeal.

5thly. An awful judgment will be passed on the good itself which we have done; for a jealous God threatens to call into judgment justices themselves, according to that sentence, *When I shall take a time, I will judge justices.* Psalm lxxiv. 3.—We have performed good works; but in what manner, through what motives, and with what views? Have not vanity and human respects had their part in them? Were not our alms purely capricious, our prayers without attention, our confessions without sorrow, our communions without preparation, and without profit? Deceitful tree, thou hast borne only cankered fruit; the vicious worm of self-love has corrupted all thy produce. Alas! what will be our doom? We may flatter ourselves with the thought of having heaped up treasures of merits, and we shall perhaps appear before God with our hands empty. My God, how dreadful are thy judgments! Perhaps my virtues themselves will be

the subject of thy displeasure, and what I fancied would prove deserving in thy eyes, will be a title of passing condemnation against me.

6thly. A formidable judgment will be made of the graces we received without profiting by them, of so many lights, so much pious reading, so many edifying examples, so many lively inspirations, so many wholesome remorses. God holding the balance in his hand, will place in one scale his gifts and graces, and will expect, that we throw into the other our fidelity and correspondence with them. What is become of so many graces, and what fruit have ye drawn from them? Tyre and Sidon come forth, and confound these ungrateful and perfidious Christians. Ungrateful wretches, ye force me to place my slighted graces in the number of your accumulated crimes; and what ought to have insured your happiness must set the seal to your destruction and reprobation. How, O my God, can I forbear trembling at the sight, and in expectation of so rigourous an examination? If this bare thought of it is capable of alarming me so deeply at present, what shall I feel at the moment of execution?

7thly. There will be an account, and still more dreadful account taken of the graces themselves, which we have not received. Ah! my God, are we then faulty, because thou hast not been liberal? Behold the explication of this terrible mystery of the day of wrath. God had prepared these graces for us, and it is through our own fault, that they were not bestowed. If we had been faithful, these graces were insured to us; the first would have drawn down others, and these would have been followed by still more precious graces: our infidelity deprived us of them, and makes us answerable for them all. The sun casts its brilliant rays upon us; we shut our eyes against it; we are inexcusable, if under such voluntary blindness we run astray. Unhappy Souls, whilst others shall be punished for the abuse of favours, which they received, you will be condemned, even for those of which you

were deprived. What numberless graces will rise up at that moment against you, and draw down vengeance on your head!

Such and still more terrible will be the judgment I must undergo at my last hour; on all these heads I shall be examined, and I shall be judged. Alas! shall I not find myself at that moment in the state of that guilty soul, whose unhappiness I have just been meditating upon.

Nothing farther then will remain, if I am found guilty, than that the Sovereign Judge pronounce the terrible sentence against my soul, which must fix its doom for ever, *Depart from me* thou *cursed into everlasting fire.* Matthew xxv. 41.—Dreadful words! I am sure of hearing them one day uttered, and I am uncertain whether they will not be pronounced against myself. What else can I do, than make these words the subject of my reflection and fears for the remainder of my days?

Conclude from the foregoing considerations: 1st. Often to meditate on the severity of God's judgments, to call the remembrance of them frequently to your mind, and to imprint thereby a wholesome dread of them in your heart.

2dly. To endeavour to prepare yourself every day for judgment, by judging yourself with rigour: place yourself above the judgments of men, when they seek to draw you from the holy law of God.

3dly. To follow the advice of the penitent prophet: in all your thoughts, in all your words, in all your actions, let the judgments of God be the rule of your conduct, because in all these things you will be judged by him.

4thly. Finally, to hope in God, to implore his mercy, and to endeavour to keep yourself in readiness to appear before him when he shall call upon you. Thus you will render your Judge propitious, and his judgment favourable: be these your resolutions; may you keep them all your life long, and have them deeply engraved in your heart, till the moment you are summoned to appear before your God.

THE COLLOQUY.

How dreadful are thy judgments, O my God, and how blind are men not to meditate on them day and night? To-morrow perhaps they will pass before thee, and to-day they live in thoughtless dissipation and sin. Just Judge, enter not into judgment with thy servant; the just man himself will not be able to bear the rigour of it; what will then become of the guilty sinner? What will be my own lot on that dreadful day? Shall I be of the number of the elect? Shall I have the misfortune of being cast off with the reprobate? Thou art still at present a Father filled with goodness, listen to the voice of my sorrow and my sighs, whilst time is. On my part I will henceforward dispose myself for that great day, by judging myself daily at the foot of thy cross, as I shall be judged hereafter at thy tribunal.

ELEVENTH LESSON.

ON THE LOSS OF GOD.

My tears have been my bread day and night, whilst it is said to me daily, Where is thy God?—Psalm xli. 4.

Behold here the sorrowful meditation of a damned soul, and the sentiments which will employ, torment, and rack it for ever, without its having in its power to remove the sad reflection a single instant from its mind: I have lost God, I have lost him through my own fault, I have lost him for ever. Short words; but a grand subject of meditation during my mortal life, perhaps for a whole eternity.

Let us then represent to ourselves a lost soul plunged in an abyss of hideous despair, saying without ceasing to itself:

1st. I have lost God, my Creator, my Saviour, the author of my being, my beginning, my last end, the source of my happiness. I have lost God, I was made to enjoy him; he created me for himself; he destined

me to glory; for that intent he placed me on earth; at this moment I ought to be reigning with him in heaven. I have lost God: alas! I was forewarned of it; I exposed myself to it by my own free will. Senseless man, how little did I know the greatness of this loss, and the depth of my misery? I have lost God, and in losing him I have lost all—riches, honours, pleasures, liberty, comfort, hope; what in effect can he retain, who has lost his sovereign good? I have lost all: alas! during life much less considerable losses were sufficient to raise the liveliest sorrow in me; men are afflicted at the smallest losses, they give themselves up to the bitterest grief; nevertheless in life they may indemnify themselves for the loss of one thing by the preservation of another; but in losing God I have lost all without exception. I have lost a goodness, whose tenderness is inexpressible; a beauty, whose charms are ravishing; a liberality, whose treasures are immense: all these adorable perfections were ordained to make me happy, and they will complete my misery for ever.

I have lost God: scarcely was I disentangled from the ties of earth, when I saw the end to which I was called; at the sight of those enchanting perfections, if a thousand worlds had been presented to me, I should have renounced them all; a glimpse of my happiness was discovered to me; violence, and the impetuosity of my inclinations, drove me towards it: I launched forward, and ran to it with greater rapidity than fire is carried towards its sphere: ah! said I, there is my happiness, there the centre of my bliss; but this happiness withdrew from my eager embraces, an immense chaos intercepted it from me. O Sovereign, and just God, why didst thou discover so many charms to me if I were never to possess them? Why had they the power to attract the desires of my heart, if my heart was to be torn so suddenly from them? Was so violent a thirst to be created in me, and I left to languish in it without the possibility of ever quenching its parching heat? Now all things reproach me inces-

santly with the loss of my God: *Where is thy God?* Psalm xli. 4.

But what do I say? I have lost God: No, I still find him; I have lost a bountiful God: a merciful God, a fatherly God; and I only now find an angry, an implacable, a chastising God; I see him armed against me, and his presence is made sensible to me by the rigour of his justice.

2dly. I have lost God, and I have lost him through my own fault. I am damned, and I might have been saved. As long as man is in this life, he is bewitched with created objects, blinded and led astray by his senses. Esau sold his right of primogeniture for a mess of pottage; he was not at first sensible of his loss; but when he beheld the blessings of which he had deprived himself, when he reflected on his loss and on the price for which he had given away his birth-right, he lamented and sighed bitterly; *he roared* out, says the scripture, *with a great cry.* Genesis xxvii. 34.—A sad, but natural figure of a reprobate, who has sacrificed his salvation, who has thrown away his soul; and for what? for a trifling satisfaction, for perishable objects, for a momentary pleasure. During life, being deluded by his passions, he made the sacrifice without difficulty, he was blinded to his loss; but when his eyes are opened by death, and discover to him the greatness of the object lost, the indignity of the object preferred, the nothingness of all things in comparison of his supreme good; ah! what are then his astonishment, his regret, and his despair? What? For perishable things, for momentary enjoyments, for deceitful pleasures, and always drenched in bitterness, to have deprived myself of lasting goods, of immortal blessings? To have had it in my power to be saved, and to have damned myself, and damned myself for nothing.

I have lost God through my own fault. If constrained by a fatal necessity, if led by an unchangeable destiny, I had tumbled into hell; if I had been lost, because I could not be saved; if, as a devoted victim

of the wrath of God, I had not been able to escape my misfortune, I might then curse my lot, without having cause to complain of myself. But no; in the depth of my misery I see that I have drawn the horrors of damnation on myself; that I can cast the fault on no one but myself; I am forced to say to my own confusion, and to acknowledge in my despair, that I have only lost God, because I would lose him, that I am not unhappy, but because I have been guilty, that I am damned, and had it in my power to be saved.

I have lost God, and I have lost him through my own fault. What had not God done to save me? Did I want helps and means of salvation? How many graces, how many lights, how many holy inspirations did I receive? How many good desires, how many affecting remorses did I feel? I had Christian parents, a virtuous education, a natural horror of sin; a wholesome fear of sin was imprinted in me. I abused these means; I broke through all these boundaries: I stifled these holy desires and these lively remorses; I had means granted me of salvation, and I am lost. I had before my eyes many good examples; I was touched and edified at them; the world itself preached lessons to me capable of disabusing me; it wearied, it disgusted me; it presented me a thousand reasons to detest it; I never ceased complaining of the severity and weight of its yoke; from time to time I reflected on the danger that threatened me; the death of a relation, the conversion of a friend, disturbed and alarmed me; I thought of returning to God; I deferred; I trusted to my resolution of doing penance afterwards; I had not time for it, or I neglected that time; I am therefore lost without reprieve.

What was required of me to be saved? Alas; often much less than I did to effect my damnation. If on such a day, on such an occasion, I had followed the light which I received: if I had availed myself of the good motion, which touched my heart; if I had benefited of that spiritual retreat, to which I am invited;

if on such a solemn feast I had partaken of the holy sacraments, as I was inclined to do: if I had made that sacrifice to God, which he demanded of me, at this present moment I should be ranked with the elect in heaven, and now I am a reprobate in hell.

One while I began so well; I cleaved to God, and I was happy. A few years longer of perseverance, a few days of combat, and I should have been saved, now I am a damned soul.

How dreadful, how melancholy is it to behold a man, as it were encompassed with graces and weighed down with mercies, and that in spite of these graces and mercies he is cast off, and eternally unhappy! If infidels and idolaters are lost, it is still their own fault; they sinned against reason, against their conscience; but that Christians, that I a member of the church, bred up in light, and in the midst of graces, should be miserable!—I have but too much deserved my misery. I might have been saved, and I am damned.

3dly. I have lost God, and I have lost him for ever. It is then over; my doom is pronounced, my lot is settled, my misery is endless without resource: there is a God, and I never shall see him; there is a land of the Elect, and I never shall enter into it. There is a happiness, and I never shall enjoy it. Dreadful thought. Never and Always! Never mercy, never light, never hope! Always in tears, always in sorrow, always in suffering, always in anguish and despair! Years will pass; ages will glide away: the sun will a thousand times begin and end its course; kingdoms will rise and fall a thousand times over, while I shall know no change, but continue still to suffer, as when they first began. But what? My God, wilt thou never let thyself be moved, wilt thou never be appeased? Wilt thou, heretofore so good, so merciful, so compassionate, never be affected with the cries, the groans, the tears, the fiery sighs, which creatures formed to thy image, and redeemed with thy blood will send forth to thee? What? After millions of

years, and millions of elapsed ages, will thy justice not be satisfied? Will no glimmering ray of mercy find its way to my eyes?—No; this God of unchangeable justice will ever be deaf to my voice, ever implacable in his wrath. A wall of separation will rise for ever between him and me; a dark and frightful cloud will hide him for ever from my eyes; an immense chaos will be spread between, and disjoin us for ever. I shall lift up my eyes, and shall not see nim; I shall send forth cries, and he will not hear; I shall call upon a Father, and shall find no relief.

Such will for ever be the lot, and unhappiness of the damned. The more they shall advance into eternity, the greater will be the distance that God shall retire from them; nevertheless he shall never have appeared to them greater, more beautiful, more perfect, or more worthy of their love; even in the midst of the blasphemies, which they shall utter against him, they will be forced to acknowledge, that he was infinitely deserving to be loved by them. The thirsty stag, that runs to the refreshing fountain, the stone, that tends with velocity towards the centre, faintly express the vehemence with which a reprobate soul is carried towards God. It seeks, it desires, it sighs after him in despite of itself; but God in his anger flies from the impetuosity of its desires: an invisible hand seems to impel the soul towards God, and a revengeful and implacable hand instantaneously stops and drives it back. What torment can equal the violence of this? Only to seek for one object, and be never able to possess it. To find itself under the fatal necessity of desiring it with the utmost vehemence, and to be in an absolute impossibility of ever being united to it: always drawn, and always rejected; always driven towards heaven, and always thrust back into hell. What storms, what raging tempests will not the violent contrast of these opposite sentiments raise in this soul? So much love, and so much hatred; so many desires, and so many disappointments; so much heat, and so much cold. Always united to God by

the instinct of nature, and always driven from God by the opposition of sin. Thus ever divided between God and itself, the reprobate soul wills and wills not; it loves him and hates him; it flies from him as its enemy, and is forced to seek him as its first principle: equally unhappy in the extreme desire it has of enjoying him, and in the eternal impossibility of accomplishing its desire.

Hence the sinner, seeing himself in this lamentable condition, abandoned by God, disappointed of his last end, without remedy, without resource, without hope, gives himself up to all the horror of his despair, and by an excess of fury and rage turns his arms against himself; he curses his lot; he would destroy, if possible, and annihilate himself; he even carries his excess to the degree of rising up against God himself, and throwing out his curses, imprecations and blasphemies against the Almighty. Wrathful and implacable God, he cries, revenge thyself by the destruction of my being; let one favourable stroke of thy anger annihilate me for ever; collect together on my head all thy torments, but cut off and extirpate the very root of my existence; curse the being which I received, curse the womb that bore me, curse the direful day, which saw me born, curse the life I led, curse the air I breathed, the crimes I committed, the baleful pleasures in which I wallowed. All is over, nothing remains with me but my misery, which is always beginning never to have an end.

MEDITATION.

ON HELL.

THREE reflections shall make the subject of this Meditation: they ought to make the subject of our tears all our life long. Enlighten and support me, O my God, in the serious consideration of these most dreadful truths.

1st. Point. I am sure of having deserved hell. Only one mortal sin, which I have committed, was sufficient

to incur that penalty: how many, alas! have I committed in my life, which have rendered me worthy of the greatest punishments? If at a certain time God had taken me out of the world; if in such a year, in such circumstances, he had struck me with an unforeseen accident, in what condition should I have appeared before him? What had I to expect but the severity of his justice and wrath. So that if I am not at this instant with the reprobate buried in the bottomless abyss, given over to the horror of infernal torments, it is an effect of the mercy of God, who could have plunged me in this gulf of wo, where I should at present be drenched with gall, and the bitterness of eternal despair. So that I am more indebted to God for his having kept me from falling into hell, than if, after falling into it, he had withdrawn me from it.

If God were to call back Cain from his prison of eternal torments, what return of thanks would he make, what penance would he do, what horror would he conceive of sin? Would he have feelings of gratitude sufficient to express to God, would he find rigours enough to exercise on himself? But my gratitude ought to be still greater and more sincere, as it is a greater favour to be preserved than recovered from misery.

I have deserved hell: behold, O my God, the sad and woful state into which I have thrown myself by my sins; and behold the grace, which you have bestowed upon me in mercifully drawing me from thence in preference to so many others, who died in the state of sin, and will for ever suffer the punishment of it. Your goodness has not been wearied out with my iniquities; it has called me back; it has waited for me: it has not consented to my destruction. It is yet always true, that on my part I have many times deserved hell, and rendered myself worthy of all its torments. At this consideration I do not say, what ought to be my acknowledgment, but what ought to be my transports? One sin justly challenges all my tears, since one sin might have damned me for ever. Can I then ever

weep sufficiently for sins increased beyond number? Can I sigh enough over sins unhappily multiplied to excess, and heaped beyond measure one upon another?

I have deserved hell: at this distressing prospect, O my God, my soul is troubled; it is frightened and cast down at the feet of thy justice, without daring to look up, without daring to speak to thee, but by sighs. Deign to accept them as the sincerest homage, that I can offer to thee of my gratitude, and my repentance.

2d Point. I am uncertain, whether at this moment I am not actually deserving hell: I am sure of having sinned mortally, and I am not sure of having done penance for it, at least a true and sincere penance, proportioned to the greatness of my crimes, capable of appeasing the wrath of God, and of restoring me to his favour, which I lost. I have approached the sacred tribunal of penance; but am I sure of having done it with the necessary dispositions in regard to the examination of my conscience, the declaration of my sins, the necessary sorrow, and purpose of amendment? If I have failed in any of these points, my sin is not forgiven me; and if that be the case, I am yet actually in the state of sin, and actually deserving the pains of hell. Nevertheless I am, and shall always be uncertain as to these points, which are so essential to the salvation of my soul. I am therefore, and shall always be uncertain, whether in each moment of my life I am not deserving hell. Ah! what unhappiness to have offended God, and lost the precious treasure of his grace? Happy, a thousand times happy, is the soul that has always preserved it! happy is the lot of those spotless innocents whom a premature death has taken out of life after baptism, before they had the misfortune of being infected with the fatal poison of sin!

As to myself, O my God, after forfeiting your grace by sin, I am and must be uncertain whether I have received it or not; uncertain whether I am or not at present in the state of sin, and of consequence uncertain whether at this actual moment I do not deserve hell.

Dreadful uncertainty, which makes the Just themselves mourn upon earth; which draws from their eyes so many tears, and forces from their hearts so many sighs, so many groans, so many lamentations; never knowing whether they are worthy of love or hatred, whether in the eyes of God they are objects of his wrath, or of his complacency; that is, whether they are not actually standing on the brink of hell, ready to fall into it, if death should cut their only hold. But if the Saints feared and trembled after so many tears and sighs, after so many austerities, mortifications, and rigorous penances, with what sentiments should I be penetrated at the sight of my uncertain situation, having committed infinitely more sins, and done less penance, and made less satisfaction.

3d Point. A still more sad and dreadful consideration is the uncertainty in which I am, whether I shall not one day be plunged into hell; whether I shall not for ever be placed amongst the reprobate. It is a great subject of fear and sorrow for us to be obliged to say to ourselves, that after sin we are never sure of having obtained pardon of it; but there is still another subject of far more awful dread for us. Yea, though we were certain of having performed due penance for our sins, though we were assured that we had a sincere sorrow for them, that we had atoned for them by suitable satisfaction; in a word, that all our sins were pardoned us, that we had recovered the favour of God, and were actually living in the state of his grace; notwithstanding all, we are yet uncertain whether we shall not unhappily be cast into hell. Why? Because though we were sure of possessing the treasure of grace at present, yet we are never certain whether we shall not have the unhappiness of forfeiting it before our death, whether we shall remain faithful to the last moment of our life or not.

It is true, we must always hope in the mercy of God, particularly if for a certain time, we have endeavoured to live in the state of grace; if we have continued for awhile faithfully to do penance for our sins,

there is every reason to believe that the goodness of God will not forsake us in the end, that it will support us in the trials and agonies of our last sickness. Such is the usual course of his providence. But still it is not less true, that if there is always something to hope, there is never any thing to give us utter security; though we must always trust that the goodness of God will support us to the last, yet we have never room from this hope to live entirely secure. In this nobody can be certain of his lot; the greatest saints, the most just souls, the severest penitents, always trembled. What then will become of me, my God, being so far from their sanctity? of me, after so many sins, and so little penance?

On the consideration of these great and terrible truths, truths, however, which faith announces to us, what sentiments do I conceive in my heart? Deign to accept of them, O my God! You yourself are the author who inspires them.

1st. A sentiment of sorrow for having so often deserved hell by so many sins, by such grievous sins, by sins continued during so long a time, and in spite of so many graces.

2dly. A sentiment of gratitude to God, who has forborne taking me out of life and plunging me into hell, when I was in this deplorable condition, worthy of his severest anger, and unworthy of the least of his mercies.

3dly. A sentiment of fear and wholesome dread of the danger in which I still am every day of being lost, and of forfeiting the grace of God, though even I should be possessed of it at present.

4thly. A sentiment of confidence in God, hoping through his unspeakable goodness, that notwithstanding my sins and prevarications, if I sincerely detest them, he will deign to favour me with his graces, and particularly with the grace of graces, that of a faithful perseverance in his service to my last breath.

To these sentiments I will add the following resolutions: 1st. I will often call to mind the remembrance

and fear of hell ; I will contemplate the place I have deserved in it, and which I may as yet fill, if I sin again, and have the misfortune of dying in my sin.

2dly. I will look upon myself as a firebrand still smoking, which God has just snatched from hell, and which cannot be extinguished but by a torrent of my tears.

3dly. In the afflictions and sufferings of life I will say to myself, that, having deserved the pains of hell, I ought not to complain of any thing.

4thly. I will often ask of God the grace of perseverance, particularly for the last moment of my life, which must decide my lot for eternity.

5thly. I will from time to time approach the holy sacraments, and perform some penitential exercises for the particular purpose of obtaining that grace ; finally, I will renew every day my just feelings of gratitude to God, for having so long preserved me from hell.

THE COLLOQUY.

Yes, my God, I acknowledge that I have deserved hell, that I have deserved it a thousand times: Thou mightest in justice have plunged me into it; I alone should have been the author of my own ruin and misery. I have deserved it more than thousands of others who are already condemned. To thy mercy alone am I indebted for not being actually numbered at this moment with the damned: I bless that infinite mercy, I conjure it to complete its work, to preserve me from sin, to keep me in the holy resolution of detesting and avoiding sin for ever. Permit not that soul which cost thee so dear, which thou hast loaded with so many graces, which thou createdst to praise thee for ever, to be reduced one day to hate and detest thee. Thou as it were, hast already drawn me from hell ; suffer me not to expose myself again to the danger of falling into it ; draw me out of life this moment, rather than that the greatest of misfortunes should happen to me.

TWELFTH LESSON.

ON THE MERCY OF GOD TOWARDS A SINNER.

Say to them : as I live, says the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.—Ezech. xxxiii. 11.

How wonderful is the conduct of God towards a sinner? How unspeakable is it, and how truly worthy of him, who by excellency is called the Father of mercies. The sinner by sinning takes three steps equally fatal ; he withdraws himself from God ; being withdrawn from God, he runs more and more astray ; having run astray, he often perseveres in his errors. What is the conduct of God towards him ? It is the very reverse of that of the sinner : he tenderly calls him back from his wanderings ; he pursues him with eagerness in his flight ; he waits for him with patience in his delay, being ready to receive him with kindness at his return. What mercy? Is any but a God capable of it ?

Nothing so true, and at the same time nothing so astonishing : scarcely has the sinner withdrawn himself from God, but God employs every means to call him back : he immediately raises in his heart a wholesome disquiet, which will not leave him at rest. To this disquiet succeed strong rays of the divine light : he represents to him the guilty irregularity of his conduct, the dreadful danger of his situation, and what may be the woful consequences of it : he makes him see the vanity of a pleasure which fleets away in a moment, and the bitterness of a regret which perhaps will be eternal; he calls to his mind the former state in which he lived before his sin, and when he lived so happy ; he makes him acknowledge, in spite of himself, that he is far from finding all that satisfaction in his sin which he flattered himself to find. Who can express the secret language which grace utters in this manner to the sinner's heart ?

But as soon as God has made him sensible of the unhappiness of his situation, he omits nothing that can engage him to quit it: for that purpose he deigns to make the first advances himself to spare the sinner the trouble or shame attending his conversion; he presents himself before him; he bountifully calls upon him; he invites him back with kindness; he even does not refuse him the tender name of Son to touch his heart: *My son,* says he to him, *give me thy heart.* Prov. xxiii. 26.—What excessive bounty? What should we think of a judge who should invite a guilty person to accept his pardon? But what could we think of the guilty person who should refuse accepting it?

This nevertheless is the figure of a sinner. Often in despite of these tender invitations he still resists his God; he seems even to avoid and fly from him. Divine mercy, whatever graces thou hast still in reserve, thou art not wearied with bestowing them on the sinner: and if, like another Jonas, he *flies from the face of the Lord,* Jon. i. 3.—God will pursue him with eagerness in his flight. Remember, faithless sinner, what passed after thy sin, or what perhaps still passes in thy breast. Is it not true, that God follows thee without ceasing, that he presents himself every where before thee, and takes occasion from every circumstance to speak to thy heart? If thou incurrest any disgrace, God is present to make thee understand, that the source of thy misfortunes is in thyself, and that thou wilt be unhappy as long as thou art criminal. If thou fallest sick, behold incessantly thy God, standing by thy pillow, and admonishing thee, that thy soul is in a situation still more deplorable than thy body. If thou retirest to rest, again thy God follows thee thither to represent to thee that thy conscience is not at rest, and that, if any unfortunate accident befall thee, thou art exposed to nothing less than to be carried from thy couch to the grave, and from the grave into hell. That God of bounty will even go in search of thee in places where thou expectest him least, and where thou imaginest thyself most sheltered from his

pursuits; he will join thee in thy parties of pleasure, and will drench them with bitterness; he will be with thee in the midst of thy noisy assemblies, and even there will make thee experience moments of uneasiness and displeasure; thou wilt know what gives thee trouble, and thou wilt find thyself wholly disquieted; thou wilt be asked the reason of thy uneasiness, and though thou feelest the sting of it to the quick, thou wilt not be able to assign the cause; thy heart will be smitten with sorrow without knowing why; thy eyes will wander astray without knowing whither; thy mind will be distracted and employed on different things without knowing what: in all this perhaps thou wilt discern no more then an effect of natural melancholy, which sometimes overwhelms us without knowing why or in what manner; but for my part I can only see in it an effect of the mercy of God, who thus gives thee a disgust of every vain amusement, that he may draw thee back to himself.

But if milder means are not sufficient to make thee enter again into the paths of salvation, thy God still loves thee enough to have recourse to methods of rigour; that is, rather than abandon the sinner to himself, God will employ the most awful threats. He will set before the eyes of the guilty man every thing that is most striking in religion, the horrors of death, which is always ready to snatch him out of this world; the terrors of judgment ever hanging over his head; the eternal abyss always open under his feet: what objects of just alarm and terror? But we know thy heart, O my God, as the prophet tells us; we know, that *when thou art angry, thou wilt remember mercy.* Habac. iii. 2. —Thy very threats are a new proof of it, since thou dost not threaten but to spare us: like a tender parent, who frightens her child that is running from her, to compel it by fear to return back, and cast itself into her arms.

Nevertheless such sometimes is the insensibility and hardness of a sinner, that he resists all invitations; solicitations, promises and threats have no effect upon

him: he is like one fallen into a lethargy, which threatens to be so much more fatal as he seems to love his situation, and to fear nothing so much as being roused from it. O mercy of my God! are thy treasures then at length exhausted? No; there is still a last expedient in reserve: God will wait for the sinner in spite of his delays and obstinacy, and by his excess of patience will set the seal to his other mercies. He intends by this delay to give the sinner time and means to enter into himself. He knows that the moment of passion is seldom the time to think of a reconciliation; but when the heat of passion is relented, the heart is then in a better condition to enter into itself, and the mind more disposed to attend to wholesome reflections. Who knows, says that God of goodness, if time will not at length effect what is not to be expected at present from strength of reflection? If I am not wearied with waiting for him he will be wearied with flying from me: he has cost me so much, I am unwilling to lose him.

This patience is so much the more astonishing, as it is found in a God who at once is the offended party, and has the means of punishment in his hands; so much the more unutterable, as sinners often abuse it, and turn against God the gift of God himself.

It is again still more unspeakable in regard to certain sinners, as God has not shown the like to many others who have been suddenly taken out of life in their sins.

With what sentiments ought we to be penetrated at the sight of this mercy which God shows us? For, after all, God might have treated us as he treated them: we are what they were, and we deserved to be what they are. Nevertheless, what difference is there between their lot and ours? They are dead and we still breathe; they undergo the punishments to which they are eternally doomed in hell, and we yet hope for a place in heaven: they curse the rigour of God's justice, and we are still in a condition of blessing his mercy: *The mercies of the Lord I will sing for ever.* Psalm lxxxviii. 1.

O goodness of my God! what have I done to deserve these favours? Is it in myself, that I am to look for the motives of them? Does not thy mercy find the whole cause of them in itself, and in the pleasure it has to save the miserable, and pardon the guilty? Hence a sense of thy bounty shall be for ever engraved in my heart. I know, that the great means of being grateful to thee for thy mercy, is to form a just idea of it, and to persuade ourselves, that as it is above all our praises, however pompous they may be, so it is infinitely above our sins, of what enormity soever they are. Merciful God! May *my right hand be* eternally *forgotten* if it forgets thy favours; *let my* withered *tongue cleave to my jaws*, Psalm cxxxvi. 5, 6.—if it ever ceases to publish thy praises. Unhappy, ah! unhappy man, if these sentiments ever depart from my heart, I should deserve no place in thine. May I thousand times rather cease to live, than not live for thee.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

However unspeakable be thy mercy, O my God, towards the sinner, who unhappily flies from thee by sin, perhaps it is still more so towards the sinner, who sincerely returns to thee by repentance.

Thou receivest him with new tenderness, and openest to him all the affections of thy heart.

Thou receivest him with new liberality, and offerest him all the treasures of thy grace.

O God of goodness! It is not in others that I must seek for the proof of these truths. I find it in myself, or rather in the infinite goodness with which thou receivedst me, when enlightened and touched by thy grace, I at length resolved to return to thee: Ah! that it is not in my power to make known to the whole universe the wonders of thy mercy towards me, and to engage all sinners to cast themselves into thy arms!

1st. Point. It appears at first sight, that after sin God should only conceive sentiments of hatred and indignation against the sinner; that he should leave him

to his own perverse ways, or at least appear indifferent to his destruction: but how little, O my God, is this knowing Thee, or rather, how does it evince our total ignorance of what Thou art? I enter into the consideration of thy mercies, and instead of those sentiments of aversion and hatred, I find only thoughts of mildness and peace. In effect, how were it possible, O my God, that thou, who followedst the sinner with so much eagerness in his flight, shouldst not receive him with tenderness at his return? That thou, who calledst upon him, whilst he was flying from thee, should reject him when he comes back to thee? That thou, who castest looks of compassion towards him, whilst he was offending thee, should regard him with indifference, when he comes to fling himself into thy arms? Ah! how distant are such sentiments from thy heart? What prodigies of mercy, on the contrary, hast thou not shown us in a penitent Magdalene, in an humble Publican, in a Samaritan woman touched with thy grace; but above all, in that truly divine parable of the Prodigal Son, where thou hast deigned thyself to draw out thy own portrait, to open thy heart to us, and disclose to us all the feelings of it? Can I call it to mind at present, and meditate upon it without astonishment, and without being touched at it?

This ungrateful son, being tired of his father's house, demands the portion of his inheritance: he is unfortunate enough to obtain it: in a short time he has squandered it all away. Then finding himself reduced to the most dreadful misery, he enters into himself, and takes the resolution of returning to his father. The tender parent, who lamented his loss, who always waited for his return, and was often casting his wishful eyes to the road by which his son might come back, at length descries him coming; his heart is moved, but with what sentiments? Is he not moved to wrath and indignation? These sentiments would be just, but they are not the sentiments of mercy, and therefore they are not found in him. He is moved with compassion; tenderness succeeds to compassion, joy fol-

lows his tenderness, and his gladness presently breaks out into open transports. Without waiting for his blushing and trembling son to come and fling himself at his feet, he runs out towards him, he embraces him tenderly, he folds him in his arms, he sheds more plentiful tears of joy himself than sorrow draws from the eyes of his penitent son; and the reason he alleges for his transports is truly worthy of so good a father: *My son was lost, and he is found; he was dead, and is come to life again;* Luke xv. 24.—he will have his family to be glad with him: he makes an entertainment, and commands every one to join in concert with him in the joy he expresses.

No, my God! It is not here the image of a tender father that is traced out to us, it is the portrait of thyself, of thy own heart; and is it not thus, and with this unspeakable goodness, that thou lookest upon and pardonest the sincerely penitent sinner, without compelling him to purchase his forgiveness by long delays, without loading him with bitter reproaches, without keeping resentment or displeasure in thy heart, but burying the excesses of his past conduct in eternal oblivion from the moment they are repented of? Yea, God of mercy! if we return sincerely to thee, at the first tear which drops from our eyes, at the first sigh that is sent forth from our breast, at the first feeling of compunction which is conceived in our heart, thy anger will relent, thy heart will open to us, the weapons of vengeance will fall from thy hands; and in lieu of thunderbolts and lightning, with which they were armed for our destruction, they will only pour forth a pleasing dew of heavenly grace in comfort and refresh us. Divine goodness! Unutterable tenderness! Can we know thee, without adoring thee, and still more without loving thee.

2d. Point. But thou carriest still farther the wonderful marks of thy mercy towards the penitent sinner, O my God. Thou receivedst him with a liberality which borders upon a profusion of thy choicest graces; thou openest to him thy whole treasure. It is a considera-

tion not less glorious to thee than comfortable to us, that during the course of thy mortal life thou seemedst to have a kind of special endearment for converted sinners; if any privileged distinctions were made by thee, it was chiefly to them they were granted. I see a Magdalene, who had been before the scandal of all Israel; but scarcely is she converted, but thou receivest her as a perfect lover, and proposes her as a model of repentance to the whole universe. I behold a Peter, who had the misfortune of denying his divine master: alas! will not so great a crime render him unworthy of thy favours for ever? No, undoubtedly, my God, thou mercifully lookest down upon him, thou seest the tears trickling from his eyes: at that instant he is readmitted into favour; thou singlest him out for thy substitute, and the visible head of thy church on earth. The good thief seems to join his impious companion in insulting thee in thy afflictions, in the agony of death: but he no sooner gives a mark of his unfeigned repentance than thou grantest him his pardon. Thou pronounced the decree of his justification, and signest it with thy own blood, *This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.* Luke xxiii. 43.

Thus, O God of mercy, thou delightest in loading penitent sinners with thy favours. Thou leavest them no other regret than that of having offended thee, no other desire than that of pleasing thee, no other bondage than that of divine love. But why should I look so far for examples of God's mercy to sinners? I need but cast an eye on myself. When I call to mind those happy days in which, touched by thy grace, I was so fortunate as to think of thee, my God, to return to thee to discharge my conscience of the heavy burden with which it was loaded, what did I then experience but ease and sweetness? If I shed tears, what were they but tears of joy? Did I not look upon those days as the most serene and comfortable of my life? Thus, O my God, is the oracle of thy apostle accomplished to the letter, that the greater has been the malice of the sinner, the greater is the bounty of God;

that the abyss of iniquity is swallowed up in an abyss of mercies, and that the abundance of sin is followed by a superabundance of graces: *Where sin abounded, grace has abounded more.* Rom. v. 20.

But, O my God, can we here sufficiently deplore, sufficiently detest the unhappiness, the blindness and iniquity of those who abuse thy mercy, and, from a confidence in thy goodness, take occasion to persevere in their crimes? Monsters of ingratitude, who turn thy favours into insults, and their remedy into poison! Monsters of licentiousness and impiety, who only continue to be wicked because thou dost not cease to be good! Monsters of execration and horror, who, under pretext of a false and chimerical repentance, plunge themselves into true and real impenitence! What is man? How great the malice, how deplorable the depravation of the human heart, to make that a pretext to persevere in sin, which ought to be the most powerful motive of its conversion?

Conclude from the foregoing considerations: 1st. Often to reflect, that an abuse of the divine mercy is one of the most heinous of crimes, as it is wounding God in the very midst of his heart.

2dly. Often to make acts of sorrow for the manifold abuses of God's mercy of which you have been guilty during life.

3dly. To accept whatever happens as an effect of the mercy of God, who chastises us in this world to spare us in the next.

4thly. To remember that mercy abused will be one day changed into severe justice, and that the most dreadful of all judgments is that which shall be passed on the abuse of mercy.

THE COLLOQUY.

O my God! I have many sins to bewail, but I never will be reproached with the crime either of forgetting thy goodness, or of abusing thy mercy. Without that I should now be lost; I should be at this moment in the bottomless abyss, undergoing the just severity of thy

indignation. Thy mercy has preserved me from it: it is more than if thou hadst taken me out of hell: I will for ever adore, admire, and bless that mercy. These sentiments shall be for ever engraved in my heart; may they become the rule of my conduct until death, and the subject of my praises during eternity. Entering into the dispositions of the prophet, I will always look upon myself as a standing monument of thy mercies, which thou hast manifested in me to show how bountiful thou art, and to what degree thou carriest thy favours towards sinners. If they knew thy heart, they would come and fling themselves into thy arms as so many prodigal children into the bosom of the tenderest of fathers.

I cast myself there this moment: deign once more to receive me, and to keep me close within the arms of thy mercy to my latest breath.

THIRTEENTH LESSON.

ON THE SPIRIT OF PENANCE.

They, that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences.—Gal. v. 24.

THERE are two sorts of penance consecrated by religion; exterior penance, or that of the senses; interior penance, or that of the heart: both the one and the other are necessary and indispensable. We are Christians, and penance is an appendage of our religion. We are sinners, and penance is the chastisement of our sins.

Exterior penance is that which mortifies and afflicts the body. It is a dangerous illusion, and nevertheless a very common one to imagine, that interior penance is sufficient for the sinner, and that exterior penance is not absolutely requisite for the expiation of sin: a fatal error, which reason disapproves, and the gospel condemns. It is true that interior penance is more excellent, and more meritorious; but it is not less true, that exterior penance is necessary and indispensable.

A fundamental maxim in christian morality is, that sin cannot be expiated but by penance, and that whatever has been corrupted by sin must be purified by penance. According to this principle, the body having contributed to sin, the body therefore must be punished. The body has often been an accomplice in the crime; it must therefore have its share of the penance. The apostle gives it no other name than a body of sin; it has been the organ and the instrument of sin, it must be the victim and the objects of its chastisement.

The whole gospel, all the inspired writings, preach to us the mortification of the body, together with that of the heart. Every page announces this truth, and imposes this obligation upon us. *If any man will come after me*, said our Saviour, *let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.* Luke ix. 23—*The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away.* Matt. ix. 12.—*How narrow is the gate and strait the way, that leads to life: and few there are that find it!* Ibid. vii. 14.—*I came not to send peace, but a sword.* Ibid. x. 34.—Thus the gospel puts, as it were, the sword into the hand of each one of us to arm us against ourselves, and against our bodies, and to engage us in one continual war against ourselves.

St. Paul, formed in this school of mortification and penance, explains still more clearly these divine truths. *All they, that are Christ's*, says he, *have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences.* Gal. v. 24.—It is not the heart alone, it is also the flesh that must be crucified; that criminal flesh, which is always refractory to the spirit, always raising an intestine war between the spirit and the body. St. Paul admits of the same obligation for himself, which he imposes on others. *I chastise my body*, says he, *and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.* 1 Cor. ix. 27.—*I fill up those things which are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh.* Col. i. 24.

Thus the saints thought, thus they acted. Armed

with the bloody instruments of penance, and covered with hair-cloth and ashes, they were seen to afflict their bodies, to bring them into subjection, and offer up a voluntary holocaust of their flesh to an offended God. They appeared emaciated with fasting, watching, and other penitential exercises ; their livid limbs, their wan and disfigured countenances, bore testimony of the pious rigours with which they chastised their bodies: and after all these austerities and conflicts they still trembled, and asked each other more by their sighs than by their words, which were interrupted with their groans : have we, do you think, sufficient grounds to hope, that God has pardoned us our sins, and that, after having offended him so often, he will shew us mercy in the end ! Alas, my God, have we the same faith, that animated these holy penitents ? Do we follow the same gospel ? Do we hope for the same heaven, and the same recompense ?

But if these striking examples suffice not, and more urgent motive is demanded, let us turn to Calvary, let us fix our eyes on our crucified Jesus, the great, the divine model which we must necessarily follow, if we believe and adore him. Ah! what do I behold ? O my adorable Saviour, to what a condition are thou reduced, and what a striking example dost thou present to the eyes of astonished faith? What does thy head crowned with thorns, thy eyes drowned in tears, thy mouth drenched with bitterness and gall, thy sacred hands and feet barbarously bored with nails, thy heart itself pierced with a lance, thy whole body mangled and bloody, the deep gashes of thy wounds, which like so many eloquent mouths are open to instruct us, what does all this announce to the attentive spectator, but mortification of the body and chastisement of our senses ? And if we, delicate members under a head crowned with thorns, do not understand this language, does it not seem as if we had in a manner renounced our faith ?

Can we then profess ourselves followers of Christ crucified, and yet say what is so often said in the world,

that mortification and austerities do not belong to the life of wordlings, and that they are only the portion of Recluses and Anchorites. Did Religion ever understand this deceitful language? Did it not always detest it? As if the attacks of passion and of the senses were less frequent, or less dangerous in the world; as if sins were not to be expiated by penance in the world; as if men of the world were exempted from the general law, which commands all Christians to carry their cross, to crucify their flesh, to deny themselves, to enter into the narrow path; as if corporal penances were not more necessary for sinners in the world than for those who, to preserve their innocence, have retired from the world. That is to say, as if remedies were less necessary for the sick than for those who enjoy health; and as if a man, because he is a greater sinner, stands in less need of penance. In a word, let us consider bodily mortifications either as means to preserve us from sin, or as penalties requisite to expiate the sins we have committed: In both these views is it not evident, that they are more essentially necessary in the world than in convents and in retirement?

But the situation of men in the world, it is said, will not allow of such penances: let them know, that their first quality is that of Christians, their second that of sinners, and therefore of penitents. The saints in the world, though robed with purple, or seated on thrones, practised penance and mortifications, and by their mortifications and penance sanctified their thrones and purple: more shining and more lasting is the glory which accompanied their works of humble penance, than that which sprung from their high and princely titles.

But what does the world still object? What further devices does self-love invent against the practice of bodily austerities? Health, it is said, will not allow them: God indeed does not demand impossibilities; but will health allow of nothing? Will it allow of nothing more than what is done by the generality of

Christians? Do not men falsely flatter themselves? Is health the real cause they mean to allege in their excuse, or is it nothing more than a mere pretext to hide the guilt of sensual indulgence?

But, notwithstanding their small share of health, might they not retrench some part of their sleep, deprive themselves of some small thing at their meals, subject themselves to some bodily labour and regular employ every day, bear patiently with the inclemency of the season, and suffer other inconveniences without complaining as they do? And could not so many superfluities in show and apparel, so much vanity and niceness, afford matter of numberless sacrifices?

Be it as it will, God does not demand impossibilities; but God will one day pass judgment on these pretended impossibilities. For what is astonishing and deplorable in this matter is, that men are frequently incapable of suffering the least thing for God, while they actually undergo and joyfully submit to very great hardships in the service of the world; they will watch, they will pass whole nights in gaming and diversions, and yet cannot allow so much as one hour for prayer or pious reading. They will toil a whole day long for the despatch of some worldly business, or to gratify some passion, and yet cannot submit to the restraint of passing a few minutes in acts of devotion before the altar of the living God. That is, they have neither health nor courage to become penitents in the spirit of Jesus Christ, according to the religion they profess, and they have more than sufficient to make themselves the penitents and even martyrs of the world and Satan.

O God, what inordinate blindness is this in Christians? Being members of Jesus Christ, let us return to him our Head; let us fix our eyes upon him, he is the pattern we have to follow. Prostrate at the foot of his cross, and penetrated with grief at the sight of his bleeding wounds, let us contemplate him not only as the Saviour of our Souls, but as the model also of our lives. He has set us an example, that as he has

done we may also do. Following him, we must mortify and crucify the deeds of the flesh by voluntary works of penance, that we may not only die, but likewise live and be glorified with Christ. A sinful body is necessarily subject to penance ; if the fire of mortification does not purify it in this world, the fire of wrath must torment it in the next. This is the gospel, this the law: hereupon let me judge myself now, or judgment without mercy will pass upon me hereafter. Certain it is, there are but two ways which lead to heaven, innocence and penance : if we have lost the one we must necessarily enter upon the other, if we think of being eternally happy.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

A CONTRITE and penitential heart, O my God, is what I come to present to you, or rather what I come to ask of you, that I may offer it you again ; deign to form it in me. Sin is the work of man ; sorrow for sin can only be the work of thy grace, calling us to repentance. Grant, O my God, that I may be convinced of the necessity, conceive the sentiments, and perform the work of it.

How great the necessity of interior repentance, shall be the first point : the characteristical marks of it shall be the subject of the second.

1st Point. Consider the necessity of interior repentance of the heart. It is chiefly the heart which has sinned ; it is chiefly the heart which must be punished : it is the heart which has tasted the baneful pleasures ; it is the heart which must be drenched with a wholesome bitterness. *From within out of the heart*, says our Saviour, *proceed evil thoughts*, Mark vii. 21.— sinful desires, inordinate affections ; from the heart must come forth regret, sighs and compunction. It is on the altar of the heart that the victim must be sacrificed, and the victim which must be sacrificed is the heart itself. This is the prime holocaust which

God demands, and without which all others are rejected by him as imperfect.

If men truly knew what God, and what sin is, would they be under the necessity of being roused to repentance? Give me a heart truly penitent—what secret motions and feelings of sorrow will it conceive at the sight of a God so grievously offended by so many sins multiplied beyond measure, and unfortunately heaped up one on another? What a dismal prospect is set before us, when we see that our whole life has been a continual series of trespasses; that we have only lived to sin; that we have constantly been labouring for our ruin; that we have never remembered God and our last end; that by an uninterrupted abuse of his gifts we have ever been running in the way of perdition; that all the days of our life have been days of darkness and horror?

What anguish to the mind, what torture to the heart, to behold twenty, thirty years sacrificed to the world; devoted to passion, lost to salvation, and eternity? Thou callest upon me to give an account of these years, O my God; they are set down in the register of thy anger; I must suffer the severe penalty entailed upon the loss of them; I deserve it, and submit; it is just that thou shouldst be satisfied and I punished, more than happy, if I can only atone in this world. Punish me then, just Judge; I consent thereunto; but punish me in thy mercy, not in thy wrath.

How *evil and bitter a thing* is it *for thee*, then cries out the soul to itself, penetrated with compunction, *to have left the Lord thy God*, and not to have had his *fear with thee?* Jer. ii. 19.—Thou hast made use of his own gifts to offend him; thou hast been able to live in his disgrace without concerning thyself to recover his friendship; it will be said of thee for eternity, that the best days of thy life were employed in flying from and exasperating thy Creator. With what eye does he look upon thee at present? Has he heard thy sighs? Has he accepted thy sorrow? Has he admitted of thy repentance? What a woful situation for thee? Never

shalt thou be certain of having found him again, whom sin has once banished from thy heart. Dreadful, but necessary moment of repentance! What made the pleasure of the guilty man must become his punishment; the doleful remembrance of sin must purify the soul by penitence. The bitter anguish, which is felt for having abandoned God, must repair the criminal satisfaction that was experienced in adhering to creatures. Such have been at all times the sentiments of true penitents. Examples have been seen of those, who, from their very first conversion, were penetrated with so lively and feeling a sorrow, that, unable to contain their anguish within themselves, they burst forth into the most violent and bitter lamentations, and rending the air with their sighs were ready to sink under the weight of grief with which they were overwhelmed. Happy the soul which conceives such sentiments! How greatly must thou be glorified by them, O my God, and what ample reparation must they make in thy sight for the injury done thee by the sinner's guilt?

2d. Point. But at the same time, O great God, what must be thought of that unfeeling sorrow of so many pretended penitents, who have so great reason to be penetrated with grief in thy presence? What opinion must I form of my own, after so many, and such heinous transgressions? O my soul, where is that sorrow which is distinguishable by the sacred marks of true repentance? Where are the sentiments which should form the character of true penitents?

Where is that interior sorrow which pierces the heart, and lays it flat at the sight of its disorders and infidelities; that supernatural sorrow which is drawn from the bosom of God, and has only God for its principle and end; that universal sorrow, which comprises all, weeps over all, bewails all, whatsoever can displease God and afflict his heart; that sovereign sorrow, which is more affected at the offence of God and the loss of grace, than at the less of goods, liberty, health, life itself, and at all the evils that can happen?

Can there be a greater evil, O my God, than that of offending thee?

Have I strongly impressed on my heart a generous determination of accepting all, and doing all, to appease the wrath of God; a steady purpose and firm resolution of rather dying any kind of death, than of forsaking God and his service? Where, in a word, is that sorrow, which ought to be above all other sorrows?

I know, O my God, that it is not necessary it should be sensible; such sensibility does not depend on us; but at least is my sorrow sincere? If it were so to the degree it ought to be, what effects would it have produced in my heart and what changes in my conduct? What is not a heart sincerely penitent capable of undertaking, of sacrificing and suffering for God? What have I done, what have I sacrificed, what have I suffered for him?

How dreadful is the consideration of these three truths, viz. that it is sufficient to have committed one mortal sin to be under a necessity of weeping all our life long; that sin drew tears and blood from a God man, and that sin is the only thing deserving of our sighs and tears?

Hence interior repentance is so necessary, that without it sin never can be pardoned; so necessary, that without it salvation never can be obtained; so necessary, that if it does not take place in this life, it must inevitably be undergone in the next by everlasting regret and despair.

Touched to the quick with these great and awful truths, and shocked at the sight of my manifold sins, O my God, I earnestly wish to express the most unfeigned sorrow for them, and to offer you at present an act of the most lively, most sincere and perfect contrition possible. All the feelings of my heart shall ever be devoted to repentance and sorrow; however painful the task may be, it never can be proportioned to the greatness of my crimes.

I resolve, therefore, 1st. To inure myself to the frequent use of acts of contrition.

2dly. To observe inviolably the commandments of the Church in regard of fasting and abstinence in satisfaction for my sins.

3dly. To mortify myself in the pleasures and conveniences of life.

4thly. To approach frequently to the sacrament of penance.

5thly. When I commit any fault, to impose some penance on myself for it.

6thly. Above all, to offer up all the sufferings and afflictions of this life in a spirit of penitence for my sins.

THE COLLOQUY.

God of mercy, I come to present myself before thee, loaded with trespasses and overwhelmed with the weight of my crimes. I have sinned against heaven and against thee; I have stifled the remorses of my conscience; I have abused thy graces; I have violated thy law; I have trampled under foot the adorable blood of thy son; I have deserved hell. If I were to pass my whole life in weeping and lamenting for my sins; if I were to shed as many tears as there are drops of water in the ocean; if I were to undergo all the torments which the martyrs ever suffered; if I were to give up my body to the sword and flames, I still should not make thee a just atonement, nor offer thee a sorrow proportioned to the enormity of my offences. Most just and righteous God, all I can do is to cast myself at thy feet, and into the arms of thy mercy, to implore thy goodness, to conjure thee to have pity on my soul, purchased at so high a rate; to present before thee the merits and sufferings of thy divine Son. Listen to the voice of his blood, which calls upon thee to give way to thy mercy without injuring thy justice. I detest all my sins for the love of thee, and because they are displeasing to thee. O that I could but efface them with my tears, or wash them away with my blood! God of goodness, make known thy mercy in saving a sinner, who returns to

thee, who hopes in none but thee, who finally wishes to be unreservedly devoted to thee from the present to the last moment of his life.

FOURTEENTH LESSON,

AND

MEDITATION.

ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST.

Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow his steps.—1 Pet. ii. 21.

Let us consider the passion of our Saviour: 1st. As the great object of our faith and adoration: 2dly. As the secure rule of our morals and behaviour.

1st. Point. What a scene do we behold, what a mystery and lesson are presented to us in a God nailed to a cross? This scene is continually before our eyes; have we ever duly considered and meditated upon it? Let us do it to-day. There is nothing in religion more worthy of our consideration, or more capable of inflaming our love.

Approach then, Christian soul, and being animated with the sentiments of faith, contemplate the Holy of Holies, in a state, to which your sins, or rather to which his own love has reduced him. He does not present himself to you in a state of grandeur, power, and majesty, which dazzles and strikes you with awe; by such a representation, he would have commanded your respect, but by such a representation would he have gained your heart? To engage your affections he chooses to appear to you in the midst of humiliations, ignominies and torments; the more deformed and disgraced, the more amiable and deserving of your love you must find him, since he has not become such, but for having loved you too much. Hence that saying of a certain holy Father: *the more he is disfigured, the more dear he is to me.* Each of his wounds

announces his tenderness to you, and calls for yours. Behold that innocent body fastened to a disgraceful cross, hung up between heaven and earth, torn with deep gashes, and streaming with blood. Behold that head crowned with thorns, sinking under the weight of anguish which oppress it; those eyes grow dim and drowned in tears, which yet cast a tender look towards you; that mouth drenched with vinegar and gall, which is only opened to utter a few pathetic words in a dying strain; those hands, which he still *spreads forth* in death *to a people that believeth not, and contradicteth* (Rom. x. 21.) him; above all, contemplate that tender heart of your loving Redeemer, racked with pain and anguish, and plunged in an ocean of distress.

But in contemplating this object, are you able by such tokens to discover the King of glory, the God of armies, the Son of the most High, the tender object of his eternal complacency, now become a *worm* of the earth, *the reproach of men*, the contempt and *outcast of the people?* Psalm xxi. 7.—Ah! the Holy of Holies himself charged with the sins of the world, and sacrificed for sinners! He, who reigns in the Heavens, who has all power on earth, and in hell, abandoned by his friends, betrayed by his disciples, given up to the rage of his executioners, forsaken by his Father, *becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!* Phil. ii. 8.—He, who holds in his hands the treasures of heaven, stripped of all and reduced to extreme want! He, who gave being and life to men, crucified and put to death, even by those, on whom he bestowed life! And though he is thus given over to excessive affliction and humiliations, he suffers with the meekness of a lamb, he suffers, as if he were criminal, he suffers in silence, which he only interrupts to pray for his enemies, and excuse the crime of deicide, which they are committing against him. *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* Luke xxiii. 34.

Great and Just God, what consideration but that of faith, of a most lively, most humble and submissive faith, can support us on this occasion? And what

must this lively faith work in us but the most lively sorrow.

A sorrow, which should be so much the more sensible, as Jesus Christ did not suffer, but because he loved us, and sought to rescue us from eternal sufferings, which we had deserved.

A sorrow, which should be more deeply imprinted in us, as every time we sinned, we renewed the cause of his bitter passion, and crucified him anew in our own hearts; *crucifying again to themselves the son of God.* Heb. vi. 61.

A sorrow, which should be so much the more unfeigned, as it is only in virtue of such sorrow, that we can obtain pardon, and enjoy the fruits of his sacred passion.

If these feelings were deeply impressed on our hearts by faith, what changes and effects would they produce in us? A Christian, penetrated with this lively faith, and with a sense of the sufferings of his God, at the sight of his innumerable offences rise up in arms against himself; he turns all his hatred against his own crimes; he takes vengeance of himself for the outrages he has offered to his heavenly spouse: *my love*, says he, *is crucified*, St. Ign. M.—and I myself am the person who nailed him to his cross, who shed his blood, who brought him to death: and still I do not die with sorrow! But if I yet live, can I live for any thing but to weep and suffer for him? Happy thus in sharing the sufferings of his divine Redeemer, this afflicted man takes a particular satisfaction in uniting his exercises of penance to the penance of Jesus Christ, his sorrow to the sorrow of Jesus Christ, his tears to the tears of Jesus Christ, to be able to *fill up in* his guilty *flesh those things, which*, as the Apostle speaks, *are wanting of the sufferings of Jesus Christ.* Col. i. 24.

Ah! Far then be from him all worldly pleasures, the amusements of life, the criminal satisfaction of the senses: they were heretofore his comfort, now they would become his punishment. Faith and grace

working in him, he gives himself up to unrelenting sorrow; sorrow is made his chastisement and martyrdom which he loves, and relishes in preference to all the sweets of life; my *chalice, which inebriates me, how goodly is it?* Psalm xxii. 5.—Hence arise in true penitents that generous attention continually to deaden nature and subdue the suggestions of the senses, that hunger and ardent thirst of sufferings and austerities, those holy transports and love of the cross; can we fear suffering too much, they cry, when we consider the sufferings of our crucified God?* *Behold him hanging on his cross, behold him dying*, as St. Augustine speaks: let weak nature weep and be sorrowful; let the world present us with its deluding charms; let the devil raise up a thousand temptations, and make a thousand attacks upon us, still faith and love shall encourage us to suffer every thing, whilst we contemplate in a suffering God the dreadful effect of our crimes. If innocent souls are allowed to gratify themselves with some lawful pleasures, what have we, who have had the misfortune to crucify our God, what else have we to do, but to weep, and if possible, even to die at the foot of the cross?

Thus have many Christians thought, thus have they acted: thus do many faithful Christians still live; and thus will live, and act for ever, all they who are animated with the spirit of faith.

I am not then surprised at what the Saints underwent during the course of their mortal lives, it is no matter of astonishment, that so many penitents mortified their bodies, subdued their senses, exercised such excessive rigours on themselves. When supported by the sight, and animated with the belief of a God dying for them, of what were they not capable? How can a penitent heart feel its wounds, when it beholds those of its Saviour still bleeding? *I wish not*, says St. Bernard, *to live without a wound, whilst I see thee wounded.*

O adorable wounds, how have ye thus, by a heaven-

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* Vide pendentum, vide morientem.—*Aug.*

ly charm, made mortal men become as it were insensible to the attacks of sword and fire? Through thee they vanquished all obstacles. Love is stronger than death; the sight of a suffering God, for whom they fought, rendered them victorious and triumphant in all their sufferings and combats. Such are the glorious victories, which are gained by a belief of this great mystery. *This is the victory, which overcometh the world, our faith.* John v. 4.

2d. Point. Animated with the same faith, let us consider the passion of Jesus Christ as the secure rule of our morals and behaviour. What does Jesus Christ preach to us in this state? What lessons does he give us? And what lessons can he give us upon the cross, but lessons of penance, mortification, and death? And what sentiments can a faithful soul conceive at the sight of Jesus Christ dying, than a desire of dying to all things to make itself conformable to its expiring God? *You are dead*, says the Apostle, *and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* Col. iii. 3.—O my soul, dost thou comprehend this divine maxim? To die to the world, and to ourselves, is the whole science of the saints, and it is taught us by the example of a dying God upon the cross.

1st. To die to the world, its pomps, its maxims, its pleasures; can a Christian soul have any other pleasure, than what is drawn from the cross? At the sight of a God dying to expiate the sins of the world, let us at length understand, in what light the pleasures, riches, grandeur, favour and happiness of a perverse world ought to be regarded by us; and on the other hand, let us comprehend the happiness of a soul, which weeps, suffers, and is persecuted; let us not deem ourselves miserable, when we are deprived of the poisonous sweets of the world; that is to say, when we share of the sufferings and chalice of our Redeemer, when we are treated by the world like him; forgotten, censured, and condemned, as he was. And when worldlings shall come and invite us to partake of their entertainments, amusements, and parties

of pleasure, let us say interiorly to ourselves: no, my heart shall not delight in these illusions and vanities: *the world is crucified to me, and I to the world. God forbid, that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ;* Gal. vi. 14.—that I should be ambitious of any thing else, than of his humiliations, that I should seek for other riches than his poverty, that I should have any other delight than his sorrows.

Ah! since it was necessary for a God to suffer, *and so to enter into his glory,* Luke xxiv. 26.—can I, ought I to wish to open to myself any other road to heaven? Can I forget of what head I am a member? What a shame would it be, to see a delicate member under a head crowned with thorns? I will ever remember, that I am in the retinue of a suffering God, and that it is only by following his footsteps I can hope for a share of his glory; I will never forget, that the world is his enemy; that it is impossible to serve two masters; that if I cleave to one, I must necessarily forsake the other; finally, I will always keep before my eyes, and strongly riveted in my heart this divine maxim, *You are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* Col. iii. 3.

2dly. But to follow this maxim in its full extent, and conform ourselves to our suffering God, it is not enough to die to the world; we must particularly die to ourselves; die to our own evil inclinations and propensities; die to our disgusts and repugnances.

Die to our senses, and their criminal satisfactions; die to our understanding, its self-sufficiency, its indocility, its curiosity, its obstinacy.

Die to our will; we must curb its desires, rectify its motions, stifle its resentments, purify its affections, and, earthly and carnal as they may be, render them wholly heavenly and divine.

In a word, die to ourselves and all things, that we may only live the life of a dying God, the chief and sole author of true life, out of whom, there is nothing but death, yea eternal death.

Great truths! Awful sacrifices! O my soul, be not

alarmed at them. He, who presents thee the yoke of the cross, is ready to sweeten it; he will himself carry it with thee. Thou wilt be obliged to suffer, deny thyself, and weep in company of Jesus Christ, it is true: but let the serious meditation of the sufferings of thy Leader animate thee, as it has animated other Christian champions before thee. Remember the noble sentiment of that pious Christian, who, when reminded, in terms of the highest exaggeration, of the hardships and severities, which would be met with in the exercise of a religious life, courageously answered: I easily understand all those difficulties, and I expect them; but in the midst of them I shall have my crucifix, and that will be sufficient for me. Truly noble sentiment! Thou, O my soul, must make it thy own, whenever weak nature shall feel its repugnances, and tremble at the sight of the difficulties it has to encounter; the remembrance of a God suffering for thee and with thee, will be thy strength, support and comfort. Ah! what will not he say to thee in thy pious meditations on his sufferings, and what wilt not thou have to utter to him.

One moment humbled before thy crucifix thou wilt return thanks to that God of love, who deems thee worthy to have a share of his sufferings, and to drink of his bitter chalice: *I will take the chalice of salvation.* Psalm cxv. 4.

At another, pouring forth a flood of tears thou wilt moan and weep bitterly for thy sins, and thou wilt find no comfort but in thy sighs and regret: *I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.* Luke xv. 18.

Then sitting down at the foot of thy crucifix, like a Magdalene on Calvary, thou wilt shelter thyself under it from the wrath of a God enraged against thee on account of thy sins. Yea, adorable Justice, thy heart will say to him, at the sight of Jesus Christ offered up for me thou wilt be appeased; never will I depart from him, and in his presence how shall I be able not to hope? To strike me thou must pierce through the bosom of him who is my shield: *I will deal confidently, and will not fear.* Isaias xii. 2.

At other times, afflicted at the sight of thy weakness and tepidity, thou wilt rouse thy confidence, thy love, and enliven all thy affections. God of mercy, thou wilt cry out, after having received immense treasures through thy merits, wilt thou refuse me a small favour, which I ask with all the ardour of which I am capable; viz. a greater love of thee? I do not deserve it; but thy blood and love ask it for me; those are my mediators: *He loved me, and delivered himself for me.* Gal. ii. 20.

Here is the source, O my soul, from whence thou wilt draw the courage, unction, and constancy, which will be necessary for thee in the moments of trial and affliction. The sight of Jesus Christ crucified will render the yoke of the Lord and all thou shalt suffer in bearing it, I do not say tolerable, but easy, comfortable and pleasant. Thus, at all times, and in all circumstances, thou wilt find in him a perfect model of all the virtues thou art to practise, and at the same time all graces and helps to enable thee to practise them, and to copy in thyself the likeness of thy divine original: *look and make it according to the pattern.* Exodus xxv. 40.

After all, O my soul, it is indispensably necessary for us to conform ourselves to the divine sample which is set us by a crucified God. Let us say to ourselves what reason and faith will always say to us: Jesus Christ is at present our Master; if we imitate him, he will be our Saviour, but whether we imitate him or imitate him not, he will one day be our Judge. The day will come, when the same crucifix which shall be presented to us at the last and doleful ceremony, which shall terminate our course, that crucifix, I say, will be brought forth as the rule by which we shall be judged; he himself, whom it represents, and he alone will judge us. Happy, if by bearing it on our bodies, and more so, if engraving it in our hearts, we make it our study to conform our lives to it, as it is that alone which must decide our All; but if there is not a holy likeness found between our crucified God and us,

without further trial we shall be at once judged, and shall bear the decree of our own condemnation in ourselves.

It is painful at present, it is true, to walk in company with our Saviour carrying his cross; but let us lift our eyes aloft, and, being enlightened by faith, let us view beforehand, in the heavens, that brilliant cross, invested with splendour, and glory, as it will appear at the great day of judgment; if upon earth we have borne its ignominy, and its reproaches, it will in heaven be our glory and crown.

By these considerations we must arouse our courage, and in this pleasing hope draw new strength from the sacred fountain of our dying Saviour. Let us walk steadily after him; he will be our model in life, our support in death, and our recompense in eternity.

Prostrate for some moments at the foot of the cross, devote thyself unfeignedly for the remainder of thy life to thy crucified Saviour in the following

COLLOQUY.

Adorable Saviour, crucified for me, I come at this moment to consesecrate myself for ever to thee; penetrated with respect for thee; filled with sorrow for my sins, with gratitude and love for thee, my divine Redeemer, I come to cast myself at thy feet, conjuring thee to receive me into thy arms; I devote myself irrevocably to thee for the remainder of my life. I consecrate to thee my thoughts, my words, my actions, my affections; I wish, that all henceforward may be stamped with the seal of thy cross. But above all, my Jesus, I desire, that thy cross may be deeply engraved in my heart: No, it is not sufficient that I keep it before my eyes, that I carry it about me; it is in my heart that I wish to place it; there may it reign, that thou mayest reign there with it and by it. I will not ask for crosses; I am sensible of my weakness, I know my own misery; but if thou sendest them, and if thou deignest to associate me to thyself in carrying

them, I will receive them with submission from thy hand, and will even esteem myself happy in being admitted to drink of thy bitter chalice; my sins have deserved hell; can I complain of bearing the cross? Thou, the God whom I adore, art raised aloft on a cross, can I regret being at thy feet? If the cross appears heavy to me, thy graces will assist me, and be my support, my strength and comfort.

Adorable Saviour, may I therefore for ever retain a love of thy cross, may I grasp thy cross in my hands at the hour of my death; may I breathe out my last in a tender embrace of thy cross, that through thy cross my soul may be transmitted into the hands of its Creator, to the enjoyment of eternal rest.

FIFTEENTH LESSON.

ON SUFFERINGS.

Blessed are they that mourn.—Matt. v. 5.

Through what inordinate blindness does it happen, that Christians generally regard sufferings as misfortunes, and look upon themselves as miserable when they suffer? What! Christians, who adore a God upon a cross, who profess a religion wholly grounded on the cross, who are commanded to place sufferings in the number of beatitudes: *blessed are they that mourn!* That Idolaters and Pagans should think thus, would not be a matter of surprise; but if Christians have such sentiments, is it not dishonouring their faith, and, in some manner abjuring religion? Being Christians in name, let us be so in heart; let us ennoble our thoughts, let us sanctify our sufferings, let us consider the merit and value of them.

If we are sinners, by sufferings God brings us to the knowledge of our sins; by sufferings God engages us to renounce our sins; by sufferings God ordains that we should expiate our sins. In the light of faith

are they not preferable to all the consolations and false happiness of this world?

1st. By sufferings, God brings us to the knowledge of our sins. In effect, is there any thing so proper as adversity to open our eyes on the precipices to which prosperity leads us? As long as the sinner rests in the bosom of that fatal prosperity, he seems to forget that he has a God to serve, and a soul to save; a crowd of objects engrosses his thoughts, employs his attention, and deprives him in a manner both of time and means to know himself. His eyes being then only opened to his pleasures, are shut to his disorders; or if he knows them at all, of what kind, alas! is his knowledge? and what does it produce? An unsteady and superficial knowledge, which is no sooner had, but lost; a scanty and obscure knowledge, which only enlightens by halves; even a disgustful and unwelcome knowledge, which he opposes and rejects the moment it is presented to his mind; of consequence, a knowledge which usually is only fruitless and barren. What then is requisite to make it fruitful? Let affliction come upon him, ah! how soon will affliction change the face of things? It immediately begins to remove the crowd of objects which distracted the sinner; being come to himself, he searches into the secrets of his conscience, and like a man, who is roused from a profound sleep, he at length opens his eyes, and views with astonishment the precipice on the brink of which he was walking. From that moment the consideration of eternity is awakened; faith re-enters into possession of its rights, and grace, finding an entrance into a heart now humbled by affliction, renews those divine lights which seemed almost extinguished, and by the help of those lights makes the sinner comprehend the shame, the malice, and enormity of his sins. What striking examples of this kind have you shown us, O my God, in a David, in a Manasses, and in all those other sinners whose eyes you enlightened by afflicting their hearts?

2dly. But it is not enough that the sinner knows his

sin; he must moreover detest and renounce it. Pursue then your work, O my God, strike the sinner, and presently sorrowful and humble before you, he will come and cast himself into your arms, like a frightened child into the bosom of its mother, which, as St. Augustine observes, is an almost impenetrable, but infinitely adorable mystery of the Providence of God in the dispensation of afflictions. God, says this holy Father, sometimes chastises in his mercy, and spares in his wrath; for, as there is in God a goodness mercifully severe, which strikes to save, so there is a justice severely indulgent, which spares to destroy. Now if ever, continues this great Saint, if ever God gives an instance of this goodness mercifully severe, it is chiefly in the afflictions which he sends us to make us renounce sin. One day we shall acknowledge this goodness, we shall adore and bless him for it.

Sinful and afflicted man, thou groanest under thy afflictions, thou complainest of passing thy days in sorrow, of counting the moments of thy life by thy tears, of finding only bitterness in pleasures, perfidy in the world, inconstancy in thy friends, rubs and disappointments in thy undertakings, thorns and gulfs under thy feet. From such a time thy eyes have never been dried from tears, thy tongue has never been free from complaints, thy heart never cased of sighs. Ah! how long wilt thou be blinded to thy interest? Wilt thou never acknowledge the hand of God, that acts; nor adore his mercy, which works for thy salvation? Yes, sinner, thy God must deprive thee of thy sight, as he did Tobias, to enlighten thee; he must throw thee prostrate on the ground, like Saul, to lift thee up; he must cast thee, if I may say so, into the grave, like Lazarus, to restore thee to the life of grace. What more in effect could thy God, desirous of thy salvation, do for thee? Thou hadst, as it were, exhausted the treasures of his goodness; holy inspirations, moving considerations, wholesome advices, edifying examples, interior remorses had all been employed through the tenderness of his mercy, and all ren-

dered fruitless through the obduracy of thy heart. No other means are left in the treasury of grace but afflictions. Must he then abandon thee to thyself; must be let thee run on precipitately in the road of perdition; must he fatten and adorn the victim to sacrifice it to his wrath? No, my God, chastise us, and do justice to thyself. That apparent indulgence would be the most terrible instance of thy wrath, and afflictions will be the most certain mark of thy tenderness. In effect, how many sinners are wholly indebted to afflictions for their salvation? How many have only shed tears for their sins, after they had wept for their misfortunes? How many never ceased being criminal till they began to be unhappy? No, I do not hesitate to aver, that there are at present numberless reprobates in hell who would have been great saints, if God had favoured them with afflictions; and, on the contrary, that there are many saints in heaven who would now be numbered with the damned, if afflictions had not drawn them from the hideous abyss.

3dly. A new instance of God's goodness is, that by sufferings he ordains that we should expiate our sins. The Holy Ghost himself assures us of it, and instructs us, that the day of tribulation is in a special manner, and by excellency, the day of forgiveness: *In the time of tribulation*, thou *forgivest the sins of them that call upon thee.* Tob. iii. 13.—In the order of divine justice our sins deserve punishment; sooner or later we must undergo it, either as penitents in this life, or as reprobates in the next; but with this dreadful difference, that the punishments of this life are short and meritorious, and those of the other everlasting and fruitless. What thanks therefore ought we to return to God, when he procures us so advantageous an exchange? What? An eternity of hideous torments reduced to some passing affliction! The dreadful scourges of an omnipotent arm, which strikes to kill, changed into the temperate strokes of a paternal hand, which only chastises to amend! Do such punishments call for murmurings or grateful thanks?

Thus, sinners, if we will learn to bear the weight of our afflictions with patience, let us compare the sufferings of the present time with those which are reserved for us in eternity ; let us draw a parallel between what we undergo and what we have deserved. Let us say to ourselves in days of affliction, I suffer, it is true, in the infirmity with which I am oppressed ; the heat of the fever, which glows in my veins, burns and consumes me : but is that fire, which preys upon me, as scorching and dreadful as the flames of hell which I have so often deserved ; I am poor and reduced to a mournful indigency ; but is my situation as deplorable as that of a reprobate soul stripped of all things, and having nothing for its lot but its torments, its regret, and despair? O my God, I say to thee then with a holy penitent, strike, slash, burn, bruise me to pieces in this life, provided thou only sparest me in the next. Will the weight of sufferings ever be comparable to the weight of vengeance that I have merited? Let us then cast ourselves at the foot of the cross ; let us kiss the hand that strikes ; let us adore the injured God who punishes as a father : his hand is lifted up, but his heart is open ready to receive the penitent, to save the sinner.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SUFFERINGS OF THE JUST.

O MY soul, let us enliven our faith ; it is necessary to enter into the views of God upon the sufferings of the just, and to admire the salutary effects worked by them.

By sufferings God tries the virtue of the just, God purifies the virtues of the just, God strengthens the virtue of the just, God increases and perfects the virtue of the just. Precious advantages which the just man himself finds in sufferings ; and of consequence, O my God, so far from murmuring and lamenting, ought we not to look upon sufferings as so many graces and favours? Support me, great God, in these

considerations, which are so contrary to nature, and are raised so high above the reach of our senses.

1st Point. By sufferings God tries the virtue of the just. Thus he tried that of Job in taking away from him all that he had in the world : that of Abraham, in commanding him to lift the sword against his own son : that of Tobias, in depriving him of his eyesight; and thus he still tries every day just souls, which he finds worthy of himself. *Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary, that temptations should prove thee.* Tob. xii. 13.—A thousand times have we protested to God, that we would be faithful to him; that we would sacrifice our all rather than displease him ; that neither life nor death, nor the world, nor hell itself should be able to separate us from him: these promises undoubtedly are acceptable to him ; but he wishes to try whether they be sincere, and whether the effects will answer our protestations ; in a word, he looks for some other proof, than that of the tongue, and this proof is to be given him by sufferings. To speak with greater justness, it is not properly God, who desires to try our virtue; he knows our hearts; but his will is, that the just man shall try and know himself. How often do we flatter and deceive ourselves concerning the dispositions of our hearts ? David being out of the occasion averred, that nothing should be able to move him ; and David being in the occasion unfortunately yielded to temptation. If it were necessary to die for thee, O my God, I would follow thee, said St. Peter, and the voice of a servant maid sufficed to make him apostatize from the service of his Master. How many just persons, whilst they were out of danger, thought themselves secure, and in the storm of temptations have been unfortunately wrecked ? Let us learn, weak souls, to know and to mistrust ourselves, till the trial of afflictions proves what we are, and renders an unequivocal testimony of our virtue.

Alas! how often in the retirement of my oratory have I formed the most holy resolutions ? How often

have I thought myself capable of undertaking, and suffering every thing for thee, O my God, and, on the slightest occasion, all my projects have vanished, and all my resolutions failed ?

2d Point. By sufferings God purifies the virtue of the just. *A just man shall fall seven times*, Prov. xxiv. 16.—says the Holy Ghost, that is, however just a man may be, he has always many things to reproach himself with before God. He has often certain dispositions of his heart, which draw too much upon nature; he is subject to I know not what propensity to evil, attachment to created things, and still more to himself; always liable to numberless negligences, tepidity, resistance, and infidelities to grace. Trifling blemishes, it is true, but which yet tarnish the splendour of his virtue, and put some obstacle to grace, and to his union with God.

Now, these are the obstacles which God desires to remove, the clouds that he intends to disperse. What more effectual means, than sufferings ? These faults of the just man are blemishes in his soul ; they do not destroy the friendship of God, but they cool it ; they do not deprive him of grace, but they repress its vigour, and stop the impression of it ; they do not bring death to his soul, but they occasion weaknesses and infirmities. Now God, who loves the just, and is loved by them, desires always to render them more worthy of himself, and of his love. They are precious gold, which has still need of being purified ; he makes them pass through the fire of tribulation to give them their full value and all their splendour : God chastises them whom he loves, but he chastises as a father ; the hand that strikes, is directed by the heart that loves and wishes to save.

How happy should I be, O my God, if I entered into these sentiments ; if I kissed the hand which strikes me ; if I regarded the trials, which thou sendest me, as so many graces prepared for me ? Grace inspires these dispositions, but nature is averse to them ; regard not these repugnances of infirm nature, O my God, but support my weakness, and continue the work of thy mercy.

3d Point. By sufferings God strengthens the virtue of the just. We are assured of it; experience and faith declare it to us; the just man has never so much to fear as when he fears the least, and he is never more secure than when he believes himself not to be so. He is never stronger, and more steady, than when he mistrusts himself and his own steadiness; because he then seeks for help from God, which he is persuaded he cannot find in himself, and he hopes to receive from God what we cannot expect from his own strength. Behold then the happy state to which affliction leads us; for, besides removing those objects which might shake our constancy, it compels the just man to watch continually over himself, to mistrust himself, to have recourse without cessation to God, as to his only refuge, to withdraw more and more from the world and its amusements, of which affliction makes him understand the vanity and nothingness. Now if any thing is capable of rendering our virtue firm and solid, it is particularly this diffidence of ourselves, and reliance on God alone, two unshaken foundations of the great edifice of sanctity.

Fix my soul, O God, on these solid foundations. I dare not ask thee for sufferings, knowing my own weakness; but if sufferings are necessary to strengthen my virtue, give me the grace and resolution to support them. I will go and gather this strength at the foot of thy cross; I will ask it of thee by the voice itself of thy blood shed for me.

4th Point. Finally, by afflictions God increases and perfects the virtue of the just. We may say, that sufferings give occasion to the practice of all virtues, and perfect the exercise of all virtues. By afflictions faith becomes more lively, hope more strong, charity more ardent; humility, patience, resignation, strike deeper roots, and bring forth more abundant fruit. The just man will perhaps often ask of God to be freed from his sufferings and temptations; but God, jealous of his own honour, and of the salvation of that soul, will say to it what he did to St. Paul, *Power is perfected in in-*

firmity; 2 Cor. xii. 9.—it is more advantageous for thee to bear the weight of sufferings, than to be exempt from them. Thou wilt be put to new trials, thou wilt be exposed to new combats; but if thou hast a new occasion of fighting, thou also wilt have new subjects of triumph. Thou shalt engage under my eye, I will be thy support in battles. Arm thyself with courage and strength: more merit is acquired in a quarter of an hour's sufferings, than in whole years of consolation.

O the immense treasures hidden in afflictions! O the wonderful Providence of God over the just! Wherefore what patience and resignation, and, if I have faith, even what comfort and satisfaction ought I to show in the midst of sufferings? Nevertheless, with what eye do we usually regard them? If we see a Job sitting on a dunghill, a Joseph loaded with chains in a dungeon, a David reviled by Semei; in a word, a just man suffering, we immediately cry out in astonishment, How unhappy, how much to be pitied is that man? Blinded mortals, as we are, we call those unhappy who suffer; and Jesus Christ says, *Blessed are they that mourn.* Matth. v. 5.—Where is our faith? If God afflicts the just man, it is because he loves him, and, if he loved him less, he would treat him as he does the fortunate men of this world; he would permit him to enjoy the pleasures of the world, to be deluded with the world, to be perverted with the world; and the day would come when he would judge, condemn, and punish him with the world.

Let us then be no longer astonished, O my soul, that the just suffer; perhaps it is only because they suffer, that they are just; and they would cease to be just, if they ceased to suffer. The Holy of Holies suffered; it is in quality of a man of sorrows that he is become the model of the predestinated, and it is only by partaking of his sufferings that we shall be able to share of his glory. If the saints could have any regret in heaven, it would not be for having suffered much upon earth, or for not having suffered yet more. The

more we suffer, as just men in this world, the higher we shall be raised as saints in glory hereafter. Sufferings are the mark of the Elect; whoever shall not be stamped with this sacred character shall never enter into the region of the living. We are all children of Calvary; it is there that Jesus Christ regenerated us with his blood; and this tender, this dying Father left us no other inheritance, at his departure out of the world, than his cross and his grace. Let us receive it with acknowledgment and respect; let us preserve it with humility and care; we shall one day gather with joy the fruit and reward of it.

Conclude from the foregoing considerations, 1st. To unite your sufferings with those of Jesus Christ suffering and dying for you.

2dly. Often to kiss with respect the feet of your Crucifix in remembrance of Christ's sufferings.

3dly. Sometimes to pass over in thought to Calvary, at other times to consider the flames of hell. At such prospects shall you dare to complain?

4thly. To think of so many others who suffer as much or more than you do, and who want every help.

5thly. To look upon yourself as a victim which had deserved hell, and which God has spared only to give you time to repent.

THE COLLOQUY.

You suffered for me, adorable Saviour, ought I to complain, if I suffer any thing for you? On the contrary, ought not I to esteem myself happy in bearing this holy resemblance of you? My sins deserve hell: by an effect of your unspeakable mercy, you deign to change the eternal punishments, which were reserved for me, into temporal pains, which will one day end. What a grace? What a favour? After all, should I wish to have nothing to offer at the foot of your cross? There I behold your adorable blood poured forth for my soul's salvation. Ought not I to mingle my tears with your blood, and to unite my sufferings with your sorrows?

I will suffer therefore, O my God; yes, if necessary, I will suffer all my life long; I will suffer without complaining; I will suffer with patience and resignation, O that I could add, also with joy. You will support my weakness by your grace. Happy if, after the guilty life I have led upon earth, I can obtain, through afflictions, a share of that immortal happiness which you have prepared for me in heaven.

SIXTEENTH LESSON.

ON THE DIGNITY AND EXCELLENCE OF OUR SOUL.

Whose image and inscription is this?—Matt. xxii. 20.

A SOUL is created to the image of God, a soul is redeemed by the blood of God, a soul is destined to the happiness of God: herein are expressed the origin, the price and destiny of our soul. Let us learn to know what our soul is; that is to say, let us learn to esteem, respect, sanctify, in a word, to save it. This is the business and duty of every man: *This*, says Ecclesiastes, *is all man*. Eccles. xii. 13.

1st. A soul is created to the image of God. When I consider this vast universe, and all the beings which compose it, I see myself surrounded with an infinity of objects, living creatures, and various other productions. All of them present something great to me; in all I find, as it were, an impression of the Divinity, and characters drawn by the hand of God. The Sun represents to me a ray of his glory, the earth an image of his immutability, the sea an idea of his immensity, and the depth of his Being. All this is great, and worthy of God; But in all this I do not as yet find any thing which shows me a worthy likeness of himself. I look again amongst the shades and forms of so many different existences; I perceive an intelligent creature, capable of reasoning, endowed with sentiment and life, the soul of man. I then say in transport to myself, Behold here the living image of God.

of which I was in search. It is in myself that I find it, and in it I discover, as it were, a draught of the adorable perfections of God, of his beauty, his goodness, his life, his immortality. In effect, in creating it, God said to himself, *Let us make man to our image and likeness.* Gen. i. 26.—Behold then here the portrait, let us contemplate its resemblance to the original. God is living, and our soul is living; God intelligent, and our soul intelligent; God is a spirit, and our soul is spiritual; God eternal, and our soul immortal. No, our soul is not only the work of God, the creature of God, it is his image, the ray of his glory, an emanation of his Being. Still this is only the natural beauty of the soul, common to sinners and the just: what would it be, if we could disclose the beauty of a soul in the supernatural order of grace? A beauty so great, that the splendor of the sun and stars is eclipsed before it. If a soul is in the grace of God, God unites himself to it, God resides in it, the very beauty of God is communicated to it; from whence that soul becomes rich with the riches of God, just with the justice of God, and, according to the divine words of St. Peter, *Partaker of the divine nature.* 2 Peter i. 4.—What dignity and grandeur, for a soul thus to bear in itself a complete resemblance of the Divinity? Let it never forget the excellency of its being, the greatness of its origin, and let it support it by the greatness of its sentiments.

2dly. A soul is redeemed with the blood of God. Christian soul, cries out a Father of the Church in a holy transport, raise thyself above the earth, and sensible things:* *O soul, lift thyself up.* And thou man, wouldest thou understand what the excellency and price of thy soul is, ask it of a God, who redeemed thee; consider his toils, his sweats, his wounds, his torments, his blood, and his death: *Such is thy worth;* that is the price of thy soul; this is what it has cost, and what it is valued at in the estimate of God him-

* O! Anima, erige te: tanti vales.—*Aug. in Psalm.* 102.

self. Ask it of a suffering God, of an agonizing God, of an expiring God. Bountiful God, what do those wounds express, with which thou art covered, those tears, which thou sheddest, that blood, in which thou art wholly drenched? He will answer thee by the voice itself of that blood, which is raised to heaven, not like that of Abel to call for vengeance, but as the blood of the pacific Lamb to obtain pardon; he will tell thee, that there is the price and ransom of thy soul, and that in his eyes it was judged worthy to be redeemed at such a rate: *Such is thy worth.*

But a further consideration, which astonishes even the faithful believer himself, is, that in the estimate and decrees of God, our soul is not only the price of his blood and life; but that, in the comparison which he made of his blood and life with our soul, he gave the preference to our soul before his own blood and life. O holy and sublime mystery! God on one hand beheld guilty souls plunged in sin, and on the other he saw his own precious blood and life: one of the two was to be sacrificed to the divine justice; either souls lost, or his blood spilled, either souls cast into hell, or his blood poured out upon earth; and in the competition of the two he preferred the salvation and redemption of our souls to the preservation of his own blood and life. How great are the designs of God? But how precious is our soul in his sight.

3dly. A soul is destined to share of the happiness of God. To consider a soul in the state of sufferings and misery, in which it is in this world, enclosed in matter, shut up in the prison of its body, groaning in a state of banishment; regarding these circumstances alone, we should be astonished at its condition, and should ask, Where is the dignity of this soul? Where is the providence of God? How is a being so noble in itself reduced to so low a condition, and debased in a manner so little worthy of itself, and of its author? But when, instructed by the light of faith, we come to reflect, that if this soul is in so low a condition, it is only for a time; that God has placed it in this world,

as in a state of banishment, to work its way to its heavenly country; that one day its banishment will end, and its ties be broken; that as it came forth from the bosom of God, so it must again return to it, there to live for ever; that a time is allotted it for conflicts to merit an eternal triumph; that after this short space, the clouds of time being dispersed, the dawn of the great day of eternity will rise upon it, and that then being introduced into the region of the living, it will reign there, and enjoy the happiness of God himself.

On these reflections, and considering this great destination of the soul, I am no longer surprised at what God has done for it; that a God Redeemer came down upon earth to save it. I am no longer astonished, that fervent Missionaries, those new Apostles, should transport themselves beyond the bounds of the ocean to the extremities of the earth for the conquests of souls; that the Ministers of Religion should take such pains, and engage in so many toils to draw them from sin; that the Church itself should be in continual watching and anxiety for their salvation; that it should procure them so many helps, and afford them so many succours from its treasury. No, what surprises me is, that so many Christians enlightened by faith concerning the greatness of their souls' destination, should still make so little account of it, or if they allow it their esteem, should pay so little regard to its welfare. Ah! Those holy anchorets knew the price of their souls, who to save them bade an eternal adieu to the world, and buried themselves in the desert. Those holy Penitents knew it, who so cheerfully embraced the rigours and austerities of a penitential life. Those generous Martyrs knew it, who joyfully mounted the scaffold, and gave up their bodies without reluctance to the executioner. But do they know the sublime dignity and noble destiny of their souls, who are solely employed on a perishable flesh, and neglect the spirit which is heavenly; who seem only to have a body to pamper, and not a soul to save; who bestow all upon earth, which will enclose them in its bowels, and refuse every

thing to heaven, whither they are invited? Are they Christians? They have the name stamped on their foreheads; but do Christian sentiments live in their hearts?

A great Prince having demanded an unjust thing of St. Gregory; Sovereign, answered the Saint, if I had two souls, I perhaps might sacrifice one of them to please you, but I have but one, and I intend to save it. Great sentiment! Let us adopt it on all occasions, where the salvation of our souls may be in danger. Let us say incessantly to ourselves, I have but one soul, and I mean to save it.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

It is then true, and faith assures me of it, that my soul was created to the image of God, that it was redeemed by the blood of God, that it is destined to the happiness of God. But what reflections ought these great truths to present to me? What sentiments ought they to inspire? Enlighten me, great God, Creator and Redeemer of my soul.

1st. Point. When I consider the excellency of my soul in its origin, what great ideas ought I to conceive? But when I behold what it is become through my infidelity, what bitter regret ought this consideration to raise in me? How great was the splendour of it, when God regenerated it in the waters of baptism? And in what condition will it be, when I shall return it into his hands? Soul created to the likeness of God! But by what marks will he still be able to know it? Alas! will he find any thing more than a disfigured image, a dishonoured image, a profaned image without any marks of its first splendour, without any traces of its ancient beauty? Where is its likeness to God? God is holy, is my soul such? God is just, is my soul such? God is lovely and perfect, my soul is faulty and filled with imperfections. How can God see himself in it, and any longer discover his own

work? Plaintive prophet! Thou utteredst the most doleful lamentations over Jerusalem, abandoned, ransacked, stripped of all its former splendour, and buried in its own ruins. Ought not I, with great reason, to repeat those melancholy strains over my own soul disfigured in the eyes of God, and deprived of its beauty and of the glory with which he invested it when he formed it to his own likeness? *Whose image is this?* Matth. xxii. 20.—Is it any longer the image of God? Scarcely do any traces of the resemblance remain any farther, than barely to call to our remembrance what it once was, and make us lament at present its not being what it ought to be.

2d. Point. Let us consider that our soul is redeemed with the blood of God. Christian soul, hast thou ever gone up in spirit to Calvary? Hast thou ever considered the scene which faith there presents to thee, the victim which is sacrificed, the Lamb without spot expiring for thy salvation. It is for me in particular, must thou say, it for me that this great sacrifice was offered up; it was to redeem me that a God abandoned himself to sufferings and death; have I on my part applied the fruit of this divine ransom to myself? Have I availed myself of my purchased freedom? When God shall demand of me an account of all that he has done for my soul, what shall I be able to answer? What return shall I be able to make him? He will have redeemed this soul with the effusion of his blood, and I perhaps shall have made it anew a slave of the world, of sin, and of its passions. He will have snatched it from the hands of the devil, and placed it in the happy liberty of the children of God; and I shall again have reduced it by my sins to a shameful slavery, and given it up into the hands of its enemies to destroy it. *Wo to the provoking and redeemed city,* Soph. i. 1.—says another prophet to Jerusalem; because thou hast abused thy redemption, it shall be turned against thee; because thou hast abused graces, they shall make thy condemnation; because thou hast not known the favourable time and day of thy salvation,

which dawned upon thee, thy destruction is decreed, and *thy enemies shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone.* Luke xix. 43, 44.—But alas! a still more dreadful wo should be uttered to the guilty soul that has abused the means of salvation, and thrown away the fruit of its redemption. Unhappy soul, that adorable blood poured forth to redeem thee shall one day rise up and cry to heaven for vengeance; the measure of God's mercies will become that of his revenge: and what ought to have served to thy predestination and happiness, shall be the title of thy condemnation and ruin; in so much as to make thee wish that thou hadst never been redeemed. Alas! O my God, have I not reason to dread this curse on account of the little care I have taken of my soul, though I well know how precious that soul is in thy eyes, having been cleansed and hallowed with thy adorable blood? Thou camest down from heaven to redeem and sanctify it; shall I be unfortunate enough to sacrifice and lose it? I, who only came into the world to save it?

3d. Point. Let us consider, that a soul is destined to the happiness of God. Such is its hope, and the lot which is reserved for it in heaven. Shall we then still see this soul degrade and debase itself by foolishly cleaving to the false goods, to the vanities, illusions, and nothingness of this world? My God, when we behold a man destined to heaven, busying and overwhelming himself with toilsome cares and fatigue, to purchase frail and deceitful enjoyments; when we see a covetous man wholly bent on accumulating and heaping up perishable riches; when we view a worldly lady pass hours, yea whole days, before a looking-glass, admiring her charms, and totally employed in adorning the vain idol of a corruptible body; spiritual, immortal being, we cry out, on what thinkest thou? On what art thou employed! So much care and fatigue for a guilty body, which must perish, and become the food of worms; and so little for a soul destined to the eternal possession of God! Ought we to have any other care at heart, any other essential business in the

world, than that of sanctifying our souls, and rendering them worthy of the heavenly inheritance which is offered us? Nevertheless, O my God, what have I done to save my soul, and what have I not done to destroy it? In effect, how do we act, and how do we behave, in regard to our souls?

We neglect, we dishonour, we expose, we sacrifice our souls, and of consequence we lose them. We neglect them: to see our negligence and indifferency in this point, would not one say, that the soul, of which each man is possessed, does not belong to him? We dishonour them, by making them slaves of sensual pleasures, and by abandoning them to the ignominy of many shameful passions. We expose, we sacrifice them, and to what? To a base interest, to a worthless pleasure, to a momentary satisfaction. We imprudently throw them into occasions, which have a thousand times proved fatal; we place them in the reach of seduction which has but too often been found ruinous; we lead them to the brink of precipices without scruple and without fear; finally, we lose them, and in losing them we know that we lose all; because the loss of our souls is at once an universal loss, an eternal loss, an irreparable loss. Where is our reason? What is become of our faith? The Saviour of the world pronounced this truth, which he would have understood by all men, and yet I have never considered nor understood it: *What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* Matth. xvi. 26.—If this soul is once lost, what have I remaining, or for what would all other things serve me? Will heaps of riches, will splendid honours, will the possession of perishable goods indemnify me for the eternal loss of that soul which is intrusted to me?

Two dreadful considerations, O my God, strike me with astonishment, and petrify my very soul with horror; viz. to contemplate a soul in sin, and a soul in hell; to see a soul in sin, covered with the leprosy of sin, an object of execration and horror in the eyes of

its God, a devoted victim of eternal punishment, if it chances to quit its body in that state. But I am still more struck to see a soul in hell separated for ever from God, condemned never to behold the author of its being, given over to furious rage and the bitterness of despair, reduced to the woful necessity of saying for ever to itself, I might have been saved, and I am damned. Now there is actually an infinity of souls in this lamentable and disastrous state, plunged in the deep abyss, without a prospect of ever being rescued from it. Alas! what will be my lot? Shall I be so unfortunate as to make one of the unhappy number?

Conclude from the foregoing considerations, 1st. Ever to honour thy soul, as bearing in itself the image of God.

2dly. To respect thy soul, as having been sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ.

3dly. To cherish thy soul with particular care, as being destined to eternal happiness.

4thly. To say continually to thyself, I have a soul, and I will save it.

5thly. From time to time to recommend thy soul to God, as if it were for the moment of thy death.

Finally, Often to call to mind, and reflect on this truth, that if thou lose thy soul, all is lost for ever: on the contrary, if thou hast the happiness to save it, thy lot is secured for ever amongst the elect.

THE COLLOQUY.

Ah! Let me cry out with the prophet, *I said, now I have begun; this is the change of the right hand of the most High.* Psalm lxxvi. 11.—Yes, I say now in the fulness of my sorrow, and for the remainder of my days, *I will save my soul.* It is done, the illusion has vanished, my blindness is past, I will attend to the salvation of my soul. Hitherto I have neglected this soul. I have abandoned, profaned, and sacrificed it; I neither knew the greatness, nor the price, nor the destiny of it. I have spent all my care on other things,

which were nothing to me; only my soul has been forgotten, which alone deserved and demanded all my attention. Alas! if God had taken me at a certain time, if he had called upon me on such a day of my life, in what condition would my soul have appeared before him? Even at present what would be its lot, or rather how great would be its unhappiness? *I will save my soul:* yes, from this moment I will labour for nothing else; it is the only thing in which I am interested in this world. Of what service will all the rest be to me at the last moment? My life passes, my days glide away, my term is approaching; the time, which is left me, perhaps is very short; but if it were longer, would it still be sufficient to repair so much lost time, so many abuses of grace, and atone for so many sins committed? Like the penitent prophet, I will always hold my soul in my hands, being ever ready to return it to God when he shall ask it of me; I will say to him, Behold my soul, O my God, thou gavest it me, I return it into thy hands, I recommend it to thy mercy; *into thy hands I commend my spirit.* Psalm xxx. 6.—I will think of the salvation of my soul; but I will think of it seriously, I will think of it effectually, I will think of it constantly, I will think of it in time, as eternity itself would not suffice to deplore my misfortune, if I once lost it. Thou mayest still possess this soul, O my God, as it is yet united to my body; it still can love thee. Light up in it the heavenly torch of thy divine love, my God; make us comprehend the greatness of our soul, and the care we ought to bestow upon it; make us understand that it came from thee, that it must live by thee, and ought to reign with thee for ever.

SEVENTEENTH LESSON.

ON THE MANNER OF SANCTIFYING OURSELVES IN OUR PARTICULAR STATE OF LIFE, AND ACCORDING TO OUR STATE.

This commandment, that I command thee this day, is not above thee, nor far off from thee, nor is it in heaven, that thou shouldst say: which of us can go up to heaven to bring it to us, &c.—Deut. xxx. 11, 12.

It must be acknowledged, that the world is greatly deceived in the opinion it forms of sanctity, when it represents it as a thing hard, austere, and impracticable, to which it is scarcely allowed for man to aspire. Worldlings imagine, that the life of devout persons is always plunged in a deep melancholy, that their countenances are clouded with a gloomy darkness, that their hearts are never open to any feeling of joy, that peaceful and serene days never dawn to their eyes: false and delusive notions, which reason never justified, which truth disavows, which self-love invented only as a pretext to forsake the ways of sanctity, by representing it to be above the strength of man. No, sanctity is not what it is imagined, always harsh and immersed in the wilds of deserts, always bloody and surrounded with thorns, always sorrowful, and covered with sackcloth and ashes; it flourishes alike in cities, and in the desert, in the palaces of the great, and in the cottages of the poor, and is oftentimes not less the share of the sovereign, than of the beggar.

O Israel, said Moses to the people, think not, that the holy law, which God imposes upon you, is placed at a distance from you, and above your reach. No, to observe it, you need neither wander abroad in the desert, nor climb the height of lofty mountains, nor go beyond the seas; you may accomplish it without stepping forth from your country, without forsaking your estates, without exposing, and throwing away your lives; God, who knows your weakness, has placed it within your compass, and you can easily attain to it, if you seek it with sincerity.

But in what does sanctity consist, and what is required to become a Saint? O men, created for heaven, will you learn to be saints, and know the road which leads to sanctity? Ah! if one were to say to persons of the world, will you be apprized of the means of becoming rich, will you learn how to make yourselves happy upon earth, with what joy would they receive the news? With what eagerness would they listen to the proposals? I have something greater to announce to you, viz. the means of becoming saints, that is, of being rich and happy in heaven, and these means must be so much the more acceptable, as they are secure and infallible. What therefore is necessary to be truly holy? I inform you in two words: Comply faithfully with the duties of your state: Know them, and you are wise; fulfil them, and you are a saint. God demands no more than this of you. The essential and fundamental reason whereof is, that all states, speaking, viz. of such as are compatible with the law of Christianity, were in effect established by providence, and providence having ordained those states, it was incumbent on it to afford means in them of becoming holy, The means of sanctification, therefore, must be placed within the reach of each one in his respective state. Now what more secure means, and more adapted to the capacity of all the world in every state, than the accomplishment of the respective duties of that state? Consequently the accomplishment of these duties was to become the infallible means of becoming holy therein. *What I say to you, I say to all*, Mark xiii. 37.—said the Saviour of the world.

Wherefore, ye great of the world, would ye be saints? Be not elated with your high station: it will render you odious; being images of God upon earth, do not let your grandeur appear but by your bounties; you will then only be great to be saints.

Ye magistrates, endowed with authority, appointed to do justice, and decide the lots of men, always hold in hand an even balance; never let interest or favour

draw it on more one side than an other. Remember that your decrees, and the motives of them, will one day be weighed in the scale of the sanctuary.

Merchants, employed in your traffic, make honesty the foundation of your dealings; your credit will then increase. Be not ambitious of acquiring great fortunes, they are sometimes suspected of great injustices, and always subject to great variations.

Labourers, condemned to daily and irksome toil, never begin your work without first offering it to God. Christ himself laboured whilst on earth; what a model to sanctify your actions? What a motive to sweeten your labours?

Fathers of families, do ye wish to be saints? Bring up your children in the fear of God; leave them at least this valuable inheritance; it is more precious than heaps of riches.

Christian matrons, form not to yourselves an extraordinary and specious idea of sanctity: attend to the care of your households; keep a watchful eye on the support and maintaining of your families; believe not these attentions unworthy of you. The *valiant woman* (Prov. xxxi. 10.) in the Proverbs had no other employ; and yet the Holy Ghost himself pronounces her panegyric, and draws her amiable character in the noble simplicity of these domestic virtues.

Children, entertain for your parents, respect, submission, and tender love; it is only by these marks that you can be acknowledged to be children of God.

Christian maidens? do you aspire to holiness? Observe the decorum of your sex and condition; that is, let modesty sit on your countenances, let discretion dictate your words, let purity guide your looks, let bashfulness be your chiefest embellishment: such qualifications will truly adorn you both for God and the world.

Servants, for sanctity may be the lot of every man, remember, that Jesus Christ himself served his apostles; serve ye therefore your masters upon earth with

exactness and fidenty, by which means you will be entitled to reign one day in heaven.

Christian, whoever thou art, thou must necessarily be one of the two states, either of prosperity or adversity. Art thou in prosperity ? I have but this short word of advice to give thee : mistrust thy condition, it is dangerous; because the state of prosperity is not ordinarily that which forms saints. If thou groanest under affliction, thy state indeed is painful and irksome; but when I contemplate heaven, I find that all the saints walked in that path ; it is therefore the road to heaven ; continue in it with resignation, submit to the hand that afflicts thee, offer up thy sufferings in the spirit of penance, for thy sins ; thou wilt become a saint, one day thou wilt be happy.

Let this sentiment, therefore, be for ever deeply engraved in our hearts, that to attain to sanctity we must comply with the duties of our state. And when I say duties, I mean even the most common and ordinary duties ; those which are presented to us every day, the duties of a good father, of a good friend, of a good citizen, of a good relation: that is to say, to become saints, we often need only do what we do, provided we do it in a different manner than we are accustomed to do it. We must acquit ourselves of our particular employ, our traffic, our labour, our prayers, our confessions, our communions ; but we must be more punctual in the discharge of our employ, more honest in our traffic, more assiduous in our labour, more attentive at our prayers, more penitential in our confessions, more fervent at our communions ; in a word, perform all our actions with greater order, exactness, and purity of intention. Behold what makes saints, even great saints. But we are greatly culpable and greatly to be pitied, if, having so easy means of becoming saints in our power, we neglect them ; that is, if, having treasures in our hands, we let them slip from us at the risk of losing them eternally.

Let us then raise our views and affections ; and, in whatever state we are placed, let us devote ourselves to sanctity, and labour without ceasing to become holy

Holy in every thing, and in all circumstances and at all times.

Holy in our thoughts; may our mind never conceive any but what are worthy of God.

Holy in our affections; may our heart, made for God, be shut to every affection favouring too much of creatures.

Holy in our actions; may grace be the principle, and piety the soul of them.

Holy in all our proceedings; may they ever be directed in all the paths of virtue.

Holy within our families, to maintain regularity, union, and peace: and holy abroad, to spread edification and good example in the world.

Holy in marriage, and holy in celibacy.

Holy in plenty and in want; holy in prosperity and adversity; holy in sickness and in health; holy in life, and holy in death; holy in time, and holy in eternity, which is the happy term that must one day unite us to the company of all the saints.

MEDITATION.

ON SANCTITY.

Behold here the great truths which relate to sanctity. How solid, how sublime are they? How can they have escaped our understandings; or, if they have been presented to our minds, how have they made so little impression on our hearts?

Holy God, author of all sanctity, thou alone canst give them force and efficacy; imprint them so deeply in my heart that they may never be effaced from it, and that they may become the invariable rule of my conduct.

1st. Point. The first truth relating to sanctity is, that we are only come into this world to be saints. This is the great business committed to us, all others may amuse and divert, this alone must employ us. All other affairs may be dealt out according to the different states and conditions of life, so that one thing to

the business of a merchant, another that of a magistrate, a third that of a courtier, or of a sovereign; but this surpasses all others, and interests us all, whosoever we be; it is the business of the merchant in his traffic, of the magistrate upon the bench, of the prince in his palace, of the king upon the throne; because before all these respective engagements we are Christians, and we are only Christians to be saints. No, my God, thou hast not placed us in this world to be great, to be rich, to be happy, but to be saints. All other affairs without this are either indifferent to us, or foreign, or prejudicial. So certain is this truth, that though we were to prosper in all other things, if we fail in this alone, all is lost to us without redress: on the contrary, if we should miscarry in every other affair, and only succeed in this, all is secured to us for ever. Christian soul, thou art immersed in afflictions, overwhelmed with a heavy weight of calamities; every thing, in which thou are interested, decays about thee; thou art surrounded with the shattered wreck of thy fortune, thy health, thy possessions; but if in the midst of these fatal disasters thou risest up and raisest the building of thy sanctity on the ruins of thy worldly treasures, thou hast lost nothing. It is the only thing in which thou wert truly interested; if that remains, all is safe; because we must ever return to this great maxim, that we are only come into the world to be saints.

I have been convinced of this great truth in speculation, have I followed it in practice? I know that I only came into the world to be a saint; have I laboured to become one? What will it avail me to be penetrated with the great truths of Religion, if they have no influence on my conduct? My God, I will only live henceforward to sanctify my soul; it is the great object thou proposest to me; it is the only one I will pursue.

2d Point. The second truth relating to sanctity is, that nothing is so deserving of our attention as itself. Destined as we are to heaven, what do we make our

business and employment upon earth? Heaping up riches, acquiring fortunes, rising to a distinguished rank, are what are called important affairs of this world, but are they so in effect? Let us not consult the deceitful opinions of men; they lead us astray: let us examine whether sanctity in the estimate of God is not preferable to all these things. Yes, it is the prime work of the hand of God, and the object of his particular complacency; on both which titles it justly challenges all our attention. When this vast universe was to be created, and drawn from nothing; when the immense extent of the heavens was to be expanded, the bases of the earth fixed, and boundaries set to the sea, the scripture represents the Almighty as playing with his work, according to that expression of the Proverbs, *playing in the world;* Prov. viii. 31.—but if there is a question of making saints, of creating those lights, which enlighten men to holiness, and furnishing the means that dispose them to sanctity, it is no longer a simple hand, which plays with its work; it is a God, who labours, who suffers, who spends his blood and life: sanctity appears to him to deserve all this; all the wisdom of his eternal counsel was requisite to form so great a project, all the strength of his arm to carry it into execution, all the riches of his treasury to embellish it, the whole effusion of his blood to unite and cement it together.

Sanctity is the prime work of the hand of God, it is also the particular object of his complacency. *Hast thou considered my servant Job,* (Job i. 8.) said the Lord to Satan. Great God, when from the highest heavens thou contemplatedst this universe, there were learned, there were great men in it, there were conquerors, and monarchs on their thrones; and Job was seated on a dunghill covered with a filthy leprosy. Nevertheless, it was on Job in distress, that thou castedst thy looks of complacency; all the rest was as nothing in thy eyes. Yes, a holy soul, perhaps unknown to the world and buried in forgetfulness, is a spectacle worthy of God, the true estimator of all things, and who knows

how to discern false splendour from true light. In the eye of faith nothing is so great, so excellent, and so worthy of God, and of ourselves, as sanctity.

Penetrate me with this sentiment, O my God; all other things will then vanish before me, and will have little influence on my heart, since they are nothing in thy sight.

3d. Point. The third truth concerning sanctity is to be drawn from our own feelings, and our inmost thoughts. If we would be convinced of what we are to do in order to become saints, let us expostulate with ourselves in the following manner: Who art thou? From whence comest thou? Whither dost thou go? I am a Christian, I come from the bosom of God, I go to eternity. Thou art a Christian, thou bearest the name, but hast thou the virtues of a Christian? Thou goest to eternity; dost thou follow the road, that leads thither? Being in this land of pilgrimage and banishment, dost thou remember that heaven is thy country? Being called to a share of heavenly inheritance, dost thou endeavour to win the affections of the Father of the family, who invites thee thither? Thou hast a crown prepared for thee, dost thou believe it is to be purchased by merit?

In quality of Christians we enjoy great names, great titles, and great hopes: do we support them with great and noble sentiments? Alas! every thing is great in us, except our merits and virtues.

O my God, how miserably are we blinded? What do we do to become saints, or rather what is not done by us to estrange ourselves from the ways of sanctity? If we were told, that to become saints we ought to take a path quite contrary to that of the gospel, that is to say, that instead of fervour, self-abnegation, mortication, watchfulness, good works, it were necessary to indulge tepidity, dissipation, negligence, idleness, self-love, should we have much to change in our conduct? and even without changing any thing, should we not already be great saints.

Behold then the question I must put to myself:

What have I done to become a saint? Where the mortifications I have practised, the penances I have performed, the sacrifices I have made? Are so much dissipation in my life, so much idleness in my employs, so much sloth in my work, suitable means to open to me the path of sanctity, and to lead me effectually to sanctity? In a word, what have I done to become a saint, and on what title can I expect to be ranked among the saints?

4th. Point. The fourth truth is unfolded to us in the following reflections. If we are not saints, what shall we one day be? And what will all other things avail us, with which we are hurried and disquieted at present? When we see children amusing themselves with plays suited to their age, we are astonished to behold them busying themselves so seriously with trifles; they are children, we cry: but according to the same manner of reckoning how many children are there in the world, even in an advanced age? For in comparison of the great objects of eternity, are the amusements of children more vain, than our own pretended important employs? When will faith then open our eyes? Do we wait for the moment, when death will close them for ever? After acquiring great possessions, attaining to high honours, and holding a distinguished rank in the world, if we depart with no other provision to present ourselves before the Sovereign Judge, shall we, on those titles, be able to demand the recompense, which is destined to saints?

Ah! how well shall we understand at death, the truth of that oracle of the wise man: *Vanity of vanities and all is vanity* (Eccles. i. 2.) in the world? Vanity of goods, which perish; vanity of honours, that delude; vanity of pleasures, which seduce; vanity of the world, which deceives; vanity of life, which fleets away; vanity of every man, who is not a saint.

O my soul, has not grace suggested these truths to thee a thousand times over? Has not the voice of conscience announced to thee a thousand times, that the day will come, when thou shalt be disabused of all

thy foolish errors? Like a man, who is roused from a profound sleep, thou wilt then be alarmed, and struck with astonishment to see every thing pass away as a dream; thou hadst refused to believe it during life; death will come, and engrave the truth on thy tomb, and will force from thee, in spite of thyself, this last, this fatal, this doleful confession, that thou oughtest to be a saint, and if thou art not a saint, that thou must be eternally unhappy.

The decree will one day pass; perhaps this eternal decree is drawing nigh its execution, and in a short time will display its terrors to us; and yet we are not solicitous to appease the angry Judge, or to prevent the severity of his sentence. Death will one day come and perhaps surprise us, before even we have begun the great work of our sanctification; and sanctity will have its revenge; for if we refuse it our attention and regard in time, it will force sorrow and tears from us for eternity.

O my God, in what situation am I? Enlighten me to see myself, and permit not my eyes to be closed to the greatest of my misfortunes. Grace indeed darts its resplendent lights upon me at present, and sanctity once more renders me its kindest offers; I will open my heart to it, and will devote to it all the remaining days of my life; happy, if I only find enough to begin, to continue, and complete the great work of my sanctification, which ought to have employed me all my life long.

We often read the edifying lives of the saints; we are touched at them and admire them; when shall we imitate them? There is not a family but what has furnished some saint to heaven, and wherein it may be said, we are the children of saints. Have we preserved the precious inheritance of these virtuous examples?

When we hear the great actions of the saints related, it is usual with us to say: they were saints. What then do we ourselves pretend to be? Do we wish only to rank with the reprobate? We are desirous to live up

to the dignity of our condition, and we do not reflect, that the greatest dignity of man is to be a saint.

Shall we one day be numbered with the saints? Each one of us has his place appointed among them: shall we be so happy as to fill that place, or will our want of faithfulness exclude us from it?

It is said, that it costs much to become a saint: would we then pretend to be holy without its costing us any thing?

It costs much to be a saint. Ah! adorable Saviour, must thou then alone bear the burden of the cross? We fear carrying the least part of it to ease thee. We desire to share thy glory without partaking in any manner of thy sorrows and sufferings.

Conclude from the foregoing considerations: 1st. To comply faithfully with all the duties of thy state, wherein true sanctity consists.

2dly. To prescribe thyself every day certain practices of piety, which thou shalt observe punctually.

3dly. Not to seek for brilliancy and splendour in the practices of devotion; but to ground thy virtue in humility, and in a steady imitation of the cross of Christ.

4thly. To form connexions with persons of a holy life, and to study to imitate them. Finally, often to say to thyself, that thou art not come into the world but to be a saint.

THE COLLOQUY.

Bountiful and holy God, in meditating on the great objects which relate to sanctity, we are touched and penetrated with them. Nothing is so true, we say to ourselves; and if we duly considered these truths we should all be saints. But why, O my God, do we not think of them? On what do we let our thoughts wander, and when shall we think of this most important affair? Is there any thing, in which we are more deeply concerned? Ah! I am sensible, that if we often reflected and meditated seriously on these great and

unchangeable truths, they would work the most salutary effects in us, they would enlighten our hearts, they would disengage us from the world and ourselves, they would rectify our ideas, they would reform our conduct and morals, they would carry persuasion and feeling with them, they would effectually convert us; we should all be truly saints, and the wonderful change which they would produce in us, would make us bless thee for ever, O God of mercy; whereas by neglecting these truths, we remain still immersed in our former miseries, in danger of becoming the victims of thy wrath, for not having served as monuments of thy grace.

My resolution then is taken, O my God. I am determined to pursue the work of sanctity; I have too long neglected it; I will henceforward devote my heart, and all my attention to it. How happy would the days of my life have been, if I had entirely employed them in the sanctification of my soul? Assist me, my God, to walk in the paths of holiness hitherto unknown to me; prevent me from forsaking them; may I never think, nor labour, nor live for any thing else, than to be a saint; it is the great grace and only happiness, which I wish for in this world, and what I still presume to hope for from thy goodness.

A CONSIDERATION.

ON THE WAYS OF GOD IN THE CONDUCT OF SOULS.

All *the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth*, Psalm xxiv. 10.—said the prophet, and at the same time he earnestly begged of God to make known to him the holiness of his ways; *show, O Lord, thy ways to me, and teach me thy paths.* Psalm xxiv. 4.—Let us make the same prayer; if God deigns to listen to it, it will be a singular grace, which will be the source of a thousand others to us.

1st. There is nothing so great, so holy and admira-

ble, as the ways through which God conducts souls to their appointed end.

Admirable for their holiness: the holiness itself of God is the principle, model and term of them.

Admirable for their sublimity: how elevated, how unspeakable are they? *As the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are the ways of* God *above* the *ways* of men. Isaiah lv. 9.

Admirable for their incomprehensibility; God alone can understand the height, the depth, and extent of them.

Admirable for their variety; God has an infinity of different ways to lead souls, yet leading them all to the same term; displaying therein the wonderful abundance and variety of his gifts.

Admirable on account of the graces they occasion, of the effects they produce, of the delights they procure, and of the prodigies they work. Ah, if we could but see what God works and produces in a soul, I will not hesitate to say, though he is great in the beauty, order, and magnificence of this visible world, that we should acknowledge him to be still greater and more wonderful in the conduct of a soul than in the government of the world.

2dly Besides the general paths which God traces out to all souls, each particular one has its own, through which he leads it, and in which it must necessarily walk to reach heaven. It is the line that is marked out, the road which is opened to it; each man has his own; one is conducted this way, and another that. Grace standing at the entrance of each of these different paths, call upon souls, and makes them hear its voice: come and enter hither, says it to them, behold the road you must take, God is waiting for you at the end, in every other you run a risk of going astray.

If a soul enters into this road, if it has the happiness to follow and walk faithfully in it, what abundant graces are prepared for it? To what sublime virtues will it be raised? What progress will it make in the ways of sanctity? To what degree of glory is it des-

tined? Nothing is so certain, and at the same time nothing so comfortable as this truth, that if a soul is faithful in following the call, and walking in the road, which God marks out to it, it will advance farther in one day by that road, than it would by all other exercises of prayers, self-denial, zeal, and penance during many years.

3dly. By a contrary way of reasoning, what errors and misery will a soul fall into, which quits the road traced out to it by God, and swerves from the path, that is to conduct it? Nevertheless how many souls have this misfortune, and put essential obstacles to the designs of God over them? Ah! is it then true to say, that there are certain souls, whose life is a species of perpetual conflict with God, a continual resistance to his grace, a constant opposition to the designs of heaven? Yes, all their life long, God stands at the door of their hearts without being able to find admittance; he calls, he solicits, he importunes them; he has only dispositions of bounty and tenderness for them, and he finds in them nothing but opposition and resistance.

God had formed the greatest designs over certain souls, if they followed the path marked out to them. Such a one, according to the intentions of God, was to live in perpetual recollection, silence, retirement, and the practices of an interior life; God had thus chosen to make it his temple and sanctuary; nevertheless all its life passes in dissipation, idleness, vanity, curiosity; all its life long *it grieves the holy spirit of God.* Eph. iv. 30.

The other, in the designs of God, was to walk in the paths of self-denial, mortification of the senses, dying to itself and all things; it was to express in itself a lively image of Jesus Christ crucified, and bear the figure and resemblance of the *man of sorrows.* Isaiah liii. 3.—Such was its way. God by his grace would have sweetened the labours of the journey, which he had marked out to it; but by a quite opposite road, this soul seeks itself, follows its own inclinations, gratifies itself in all things, is impatient of

contradiction, will bear with no restraint, yields to its passions and evil propensities, and that in spite of the voice of grace, in spite of its own conscience, and contrary to the lights of the Holy Ghost. What a situation? What unhappiness for this soul? What estrangement from the ways of God?

Another, in the views of Providence, was called to an absolute renunciation of all things, an utter separation of heart and affection from friends, acquaintance, worldly connexions; God alone, with this soul alone, was the line marked out to it. Notwithstanding, this soul forms engagements, friendships, connexions, wherein perhaps there is strictly nothing criminal. Yet there is always an attachment and division of the heart; pleasure and occupation are found in these earthly connexions. God for a long time had been soliciting this soul to make the sacrifice of them; he never speaks and treats with it but on the subject of disengagement, renunciation, solitude, retirement; and the soul understands his language, it sees his views, and cannot help being persuaded of his intentions. Nevertheless it still resists, it refuses the sacrifice, it persists in its connexions and attachment. What a lamentable situation? Perhaps in the eyes of men, the state of this soul bears no other than an innocent appearance, but in the eyes of a jealous God it is a deplorable state. He demanded the heart, the whole heart; he sought to be united to his creature, and would have his creature linked in close friendship with him. Another soul would run less risk herein; but this has ever thing to fear; by neglecting its perfection it puts even its salvation in danger.

Another again, according to the decrees of God, and the calls of grace, was invited to an utter dependence on and a holy abandoning of itself into the hands of God: docility, submission, a thorough conformity to his adorable will, were its road. And all its life long its does its own will, it follows its own projects, it disposes of itself, it forms and executes the system of its own conduct; that is to say, all its life long it opposes

God, it resists the guidance of providence, it makes itself the arbiter of its own lot. Faithless soul, how darest thou live in this state? How canst thou not dread dying in it, since thou wouldst die out of the way which God has assigned thee? He marked out a road to thee; thou hast strayed from it; whither will that, which thou followest, lead thee? Thou perhaps wilt take a few steps in a path strewed with flowers, and at the end of thy career thou wilt sink into a woful abyss, the just but dreadful punishment of thy resistance.

Let it however not be imagined, that these souls, in opposing the designs of God, and in withdrawing themselves from his direction, enjoy peace under their opposition and resistance. Doubts, anxieties, and remorses continually beset them. In vain do they strive to fly from the presence of God, and screen themselves from his just reproaches; God follows them every where, and will not allow them to relish the fruit of their opposition. Oftentimes they are forced to cry out that they are sensible they are resisting God, and are not what they ought to be. What an acknowledgement, and one day what a subject of condemnation?

In what therefore does the misery, danger, and illusion of these souls consist, if they continue in their guilty state, and die in it? They are miserable on account of the infidelities and sins they commit; miserable from the remorses of conscience, which tear them in pieces; miserable from the dangers to which they are exposed; miserable from their abuse of grace; miserable by reason of the alarms and terrors which they prepare for themselves against the hour of death; miserable on account of the dreadful judgment they will undergo; finally, miserable from the illusion in which they live in time, and from the regret which they perhaps will feel for eternity.

4thly. But is the evil without redress; and when a soul has once strayed from the road which God assigned it, has it no means of returning to it? There are two, viz. a sincere sorrow for the past, and, an utter abandoning of itself into the hands of God for the future.

A truly inward sorrow, which afflicts, pierces, and subdues the heart, that has been so often, so long, and so wilfully unfaithful to its God; if it has hitherto been rebellious to grace, let it henceforward be pliable to the voice of repentance.

An universal sorrow for so many oppositions made to the designs of God, for so many resistances to grace, for so many lights extinguished, for so many remorses stifled, for so many faults accumulated, for so many errors committed.

A continued sorrow, which should last as long as life. Unfaithful soul, weep and never cease lamenting; seeing thou hast so long opposed, contradicted, and fought against thy God.

A lively and bitter sorrow, proportioned to the greatness of its infidelities and resistance.

Sorrow is the remedy for the past evil; a total abandoning of itself without exception into the hands of God, an inviolable submission to his pleasure, and a constant fidelity to walk in the road, which he marks out, is the preservative for the future. Long enough hast thou refused and gone astray; henceforward let thyself be led; be contented to walk as God directs; abandon thyself into his hands, and leave him the master of thy destiny.

Through these means, and by such dispositions, thou wilt enter again into the ways of God, and recover his grace and favour. A merciful God is bountiful enough to forget the past, to receive thee again, as though thou hadst never forsaken him, to love thee, as though thou hadst never displeased him, and to lead thee by the hand, as though thou hadst never run astray. Adore his goodness, give him thanks for having deigned to call thee back into thy way, entreat him to support thee in it, walk therein faithfully, generously, constantly; thou wilt have the happiness of arriving at length at the term to which he has destined thee.

END OF FIRST PART.

THE

ELEVATION

OF

THE SOUL TO GOD.

FIRST LESSON.

ON THE EXCELLENCE OF SANCTIFYING GRACE.

Give thanks to God the Father, who has made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light.—Col. i. 12.

NOTHING is so important and even so necessary for us, as to know the superior excellence of grace, and thereby the care we ought to take to preserve it, if we have the happiness of possessing it.

1st. Sanctifying grace is the principle, which raises us to a supernatural and divine state, in virtue of which we are destined to a supernatural end, to an intimate enjoyment of God, to the light of glory, and to the pleasures accruing from the intuitive vision of God; that is, we are destined to see God *face to face*, to possess him immediately in himself, to behold his beauties, not as it were *through a glass in a dark manner*, (1 Cor. xiii. 21.)by an abstract and obscure knowledge, but in the fulness of his own eternal splendour and glory. In effect, when we are possessed of this grace, with what glorious titles are we honored? Shall we say, that in virtue of sanctifying grace we are raised above ourselves, that it forms an intimate connexion between God and us, that by it we share of the friendship and most tender affections of God himself? All this is great, but it still falls short of what the Prince of the Apostles conceives of it. Enlightened by that grace, of which he makes the encomium, he expresses him-

self concerning it in terms which would astonish us if we did not know, that the Holy Ghost himself was the author of them. He does not hesitate to assert, that in virtue of sanctifying grace we are *made partakers of the divine nature;* 2 Peter i. 4.—because sanctifying grace forms, as it were, a new existence in us, and gives us a new life; it is not any longer ourselves, who live, but God lives in us. Could a weak creature ever hope to be raised to so high a pitch of glory?

2dly. The second privilege of sanctifying grace is, that it is the title of our adoption amongst the children of God. 'My brethren,' said the beloved disciple of Jesus Christ, '*behold*, that is, view with surprise and astonishment, *what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should* not only *be called*, but *should be*, in effect, *the sons of God*.'—1 John iii. 1. Jesus Christ is the son of God by nature, we are so by adoption, as faith teaches us. Yes, all ye, who have the happiness of being in the state of grace, are the children of God. The Holy Ghost himself bears this glorious testimony of you, and authorises you to bestow on God the tender name of Father, *whereby we cry*, Abba (*Father*)—Rom. viii. 17.

Have we ever considered, on what just titles we so often call upon God, as *our Father*, and when in the daily homage of our prayers we address those comfortable words to him, have we ever understood the sense, and fully penetrated the meaning of them? Let us at least understand it this day, and when we shall henceforward use these words, let us repeat them with sentiments of tenderness and affection; let us say always with new feelings of love, My God and my Father; but at the same time let us remember, that the Father, on whom we call, is in heaven to teach us, that the earth, where we dwell, is to us a place of pilgrimage and banishment, that heaven is our true country, and that we must tend thither; since a child must always be desirous to be in the company of his father, to share his glory, and partake of his blessings.

3dly. The third privilege of sanctifying grace is the right it gives us to the heavenly inheritance: for in making us children of God, it at the same time makes us heirs of his glory, and *joint heirs with Christ.* Rom. viii. 15.—When a father in this world is blessed with worthy children, he cannot without injustice adopt others, because a division of his estates among strangers is always a diminution of the shares of the right heirs. It is not so with thee, O my God. If thou adoptest all men for thy children, the number of the adopted will never take away any thing from the richness of the respective inheritances. The heavenly treasures are like the light, which suffers no diminution by being communicated; I do not receive less benefit from the rays of the sun, than if I was the only man in the world to be warmed by them. If all the children of God open their hearts to grace, the Father of mercies has wherewith to fill them all. Such therefore ought to be my sentiments, as of a child of God, and when I lift my eyes to heaven, I should say to myself, that glory, those treasures, those delights, those crowns, those sceptres, all are mine. The children of the world have their inheritance in the region of the dead, mine is in the land of the living; the heavenly Father has prepared it for me within himself, and grace is the secure pledge, which he has given me of it.

4thly. Sanctifying grace carries its favours still farther, and to complete our happiness even in this life, it makes God himself come to us, and fix his dwelling in our soul. In virtue of sanctifying grace he resides in it, he possesses it by his presence, he enlightens it by his wisdom, he supports it by his power; so that God is the soul, as a king in the midst of his empire to hold the command; as a master in his family to preside over it; as a shepherd with his flock to direct it. Our heart then becomes a species of living paradise capable of drawing down God to this earth; so that, according to the comfortable reflection of a holy Father, if God were not immense, and did not fill heaven and earth by his immensity, he would in some

manner quit heaven to come and dwell in that soul; so great are its charms in his eyes, when it is endowed with grace, and so great his tenderness for it. All heavenly blessings, all virtues reside, as it were, by agreement in it; faith with its flaming torch, hope with its boundless desires, charity with its glowing fervour; the blessed spirits themselves glory in keeping company with a soul in grace; all heaven seems to be with it, because God himself is in it.

If such are the privileges of grace, if sanctifying grace is the fertile source, from whence so many blessings at once spring, if it is a precious dew, which spreads such heavenly influence, if the land of promise, where the fruits of benediction grow, is there any one, who will not aspire to obtain it, who will not be enchanted with its beauty, who will not give it his esteem and affection, who will not prefer it to all the enjoyments and treasures of this earth, who will not regard it, as the only object deserving the attention and most ardent pursuit of his heart? In effect, what are all other things without this? Thrones, crowns, sceptres, all dwindle to their original nothing without grace, and with it they are all dignified, all become great. Look upon that poor abandoned man, covered with rags, who, in the eyes of the world, is an object of contempt, or at farthest of compassion; contemptible however as he is, if he be possessed of grace, he is greater in the sight of God than all the conquerors or sovereigns of the earth, when deprived of it. Cast your eyes on the other hand on that happy man of the world, that potentate of the earth, who in the judgment of the world, has every thing great around him, and is encompassed with splendour; yet if he has not the grace of God, he is but an object of indignation in his divine sight; God only regards him with disdain and supports him with horror. Grace, grace, is the principle of true grandeur.

Are we desirous to see a convincing proof and truly striking example of this truth! Let us go in search of one, but where? Not in the palaces of the great, not on the thrones of kings, not at the head of armies

amidst conquerors, but on the dung-hill of a Job. *Hast thou considered my servant Job,* (Job i. 8.) says God, with a species of complacency. Yes, Lord, we have seen him, but in what situation? Covered with a filthy ulcer, devoured alive by vermin. Ah! Nevertheless, says God, this man, apparently smitten by Heaven, is the favourite of my heart, the object of my complacency, the man, to whom I have entrusted the interest of my glory, and he, who makes the subject of my triumphs. Through the midst of the clouds, which encompass him, I see the rays of grace dart forth: at the sight of that grace the place itself, where he is seated, becomes a kind of altar raised to my honour; the worms, which crawl over him, are less the ministers of my anger, than of my mercy; and Job himself is the precious victim, who is offered as an holocaust to me. I receive him from the hands of grace; never was there a more pleasing sacrifice made to me. Go then, and contemplate the great in their palaces, the rich seated in their riches; if they have not grace, I know them not, or if I know them, it is only to smite them in my wrath. Job on his dunghill is greater in my eyes, than sovereigns on their thrones; Job covered with a leprosy is more dear to my heart than kings clothed in purple.

O heavenly grace, if thou art the worthy object of God's own complacency, what place oughtest thou to hold in the esteem and affections of men!

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

Being instructed by your heavenly light, O my God, I see, that sanctifying grace is at once the most precious and necessary thing for me, and nevertheless of all things the most exposed to danger. What care therefore ought I not to take to preserve it? With just reason did you say by the mouth of the wise man *with all watchfulness keep thy heart,* (Prov. iv, 23.) and

in it the treasure of divine grace: but, alas! what will all my care avail, if I am not supported by your aid?

1st Point. We must carefully preserve grace, as being to us the most precious of all things. The care we take to preserve any possession should always be proportioned to the value of the thing we possess; so that the more valuable the thing is, the greater ought to be our care to preserve it. Now of what value is grace to us? It is the first and chiefest of all desirable blessings, nay, properly speaking, it is the only one; since grace is the source of all other blessings to us. In effect, what numberless favours are derived to us from grace? What equals the excellence itself of grace? What is comparable to its immense riches? But, above all, what comes up to the sweetness and delight of grace, to that peace of soul, that tranquillity of conscience, that quiet of heart, that holy confidence in God, those ineffable raptures of divine love, proceeding from grace, which give, as it were, a foretaste of the joys of heaven?

Just and faithful souls, who enjoy the friendship of your Creator, and whose happiness I admire, bear witness to my words, and tell me, if this be not, what you often experienced in those blissful moments when you devoted yourselves with your whole hearts to God? What did you then feel but sweetness, comfort and peace? If you shed tears, were they not tears of joy? Were not those days numbered among the happiest of your lives? Did you not regard the land of grace, as that delightful region, where milk and honey flow? Did not the enjoyment of grace alone stand you in stead of all other treasures and enjoyments?

And can I myself, O God, without being touched and deeply affected, call to mind those blessed moments, when enlightened by your grace I had the happiness to return and dedicate myself to you? But can I, without the most heinous ingratitude, after being readmitted to your favour, expose myself again to the danger of losing the precious treasure of your

grace? Should I not thereby render myself for ever unworthy of your gifts, and of your love?

2d Point. We must carefully preserve grace, since grace is to us the most necessary of all things. What would all other things avail me without grace, and if I am possessed of grace, what can they all add to my happiness? With grace I am able to do all things, and I am master of every thing. Without grace I have nothing; I am able to do nothing, I am nothing. If I possessed all the treasures of the world without grace, I should live in melancholy want; and though I enjoyed all its pleasures and delights, without grace I could not relish them. Grace is so necessary, that, independently of it, I can merit nothing for heaven; all my actions are barren, my works dead, my talents buried, my steps faultering and wandering astray. Without grace I never can have admittance to heaven, and shall only be eternally miserable.

Hence what have not the saints done and suffered to regain or preserve this grace? What drew the hermits and anchorites into the desert, and buried them alive in dens and caves? Ah! they answer me: we had a treasure entrusted to us, which we held in *earthen vessels;* 2 Cor. v. 7.—and we were persuaded, that the closest retirement could not be too secure a shelter for us. What prevailed on these wan and emaciated penitents, whom I behold worn out with their penitential exercises, to use such severity to themselves? The air reechoed with their sighs, the earth was watered with their tears. Ah! they cry to me from the shelter of their retirement: we knew the price of grace, and we feared our own frailty. Above all, what animated those invincible champions of Christianity, the glorious martyrs to mount the scaffold with cheerfulness, and cling to the flaming stake? Their members are torn in pieces, and the earth streams with their blood. The voice itself of this blood answers me: We die, we die with joy, nay, we would give a thousand lives to preserve the life of grace.

My God, how noble are these sentiments? How de-

sirable are they? But are they mine? Grace undoubtedly has inspired me with them; but have I cherished and nourished them in my heart? Happy they, O my God, who have never lost the precious treasure of thy grace! Truly happy! For is not this precious treasure preferable to all the treasures of the earth? What sorrow, what troubles do these men spare themselves during life, what terrible alarms at the hour of death?

3d Point. We must carefully preserve grace, because it is exposed to the attacks of a thousand dangerous enemies. Grace is a polished mirror, which is sullied with the last breath; a flower, that fades and is broken down by the smallest wind; a tender bud, which is nipped, and perishes with the least cold. Yet how many enemies assault it, and what efforts do they exert to deprive us of it? Enemies from without, enemies around us, enemies within, all conspire to its ruin. From without, are *the devils*, who *as roaring lions go about, seeking whom they may devour;* 1 Pet. v. 8.—around us is a perverse world, which, by a thousand dangerous objects, studies to seduce and pervert us; within us are infinite violent passions, domestic enemies, and therefore more to be dreaded, always rising in rebellion, always conspiring our ruin, always bent on our own and on the destruction of grace.

O precious gift of God, divine grace, how shalt thou escape from the attacks of so many formidable hosts? how shalt thou subsist in the heart of an enemy's country, unless we labour at all times by constant assiduity, watchfulness, and a wholesome fear, to shelter and preserve thee?

What therefore must we do, O my God, and what means must we use to preserve grace? What is done every day in the world to preserve a thing, which worldlings esteem and value; for in this regard the world itself may be a model to us.

What do we do ourselves for the preservation of our goods, our health, our life? Never can sufficient care, attention, and precaution be taken. We are alarmed at the smallest indisposition, the most trifling

ailment puts us almost out of ourselves? Why, Because life is at stake. O my God, how long will the *children of this world* be *wiser in their generation, than the children of light?* Luke xvi.—What! blind as we are, are our goods, our fortunes, our health, our life, more dear to us, more valuable than the grace of God, and the life of grace? Ah! let us adopt for its preservation all the means, which prudence, reason, and faith dictate, viz. humility, watchfulness, prayers, retirement, but above all, a careful flight from the occasions of sin.

No, my God, I am thoroughly convinced that there is no virtue so well established, no resolution so strong and effectual, as to withstand for any long time certain dangerous occasions. In vain shall I trust to the sincerity of my feelings, to the strength of my purposes; if I expose myself, I shall fall; if I throw myself into the occasion, the occasion will prove my ruin. I must look upon my passions, as a torch not properly extinguished, that is still smoking, and ready to be lighted again into a blaze by the smallest breath.—Prayer, retirement, and fear, are the only means of preserving grace and attaining to salvation.

I am bound then by the principles of my faith to say to myself, and ever to imprint this truth deeply in my heart, that grace is the most valuable of all things; that if all the goods of the world, honours, riches, pleasures, with all their endearments were set forth on one side, and grace placed in competition with them on the other, they would all vanish like smoke, and disappear as an empty nothing, in the presence of grace.

Grace is of so high a value, that, properly speaking, it is the only thing which we should be ambitious of possessing, the only one, of which we should regret the loss.

Grace is so great a treasure, that it is the only one which we can possess in this world, the only one, that will remain with us after death.

Grace is so valuable, that if to purchase it, or for fear of losing it, we were to sacrifice all our goods

however great they may be, our health, however precious, our life, however dear to us, we should not hesitate one moment on the choice to be made, but calling forth Christian heroism to our assistance, we ought to offer our head, and receive the deadly stroke, open our bosom, and admit the pointed dagger to our heart, rather than suffer the smallest diminution of grace.

Grace is so excellent in its own nature, that there is no difference between a predestined and a damned soul, between a saint and a reprobate, but what grace makes; so great and so precious is it in the sight of God.

I can and must still add, that grace is so inestimable a blessing, that there is nothing on earth that can give me a just idea of it; to conceive its value I must rise up to heaven, to the throne itself of God. A God is its author, the blood of a God its price, the happiness of a God its reward.

Finally, Grace is something so great and valuable, that when we shall hereafter appear before the tribunal of God, if we have the happiness of possessing it, our judgment will be settled, our sentence determined, our lot fixed at once; without answering for ourselves, grace will speak for us; and if we present ourselves with it before the gate of heaven, heaven will open to us, and the possession of it be insured to us for ever. O my soul, *with all watchfulness keep thy heart*, (Prov. iv. 23.) and preserve in it to thy last breath the greatest and most precious of all the gifts of God.

Conclude from the foregoing considerations: 1st. Always to look upon your soul, as the spouse of God; if grace dwells in her, she is a beloved spouse; if she is deprived of it, God rejects and casts her off.

2dly. To consider your soul as the image of God; as long as it possesses grace, it is a beautiful resemblance of the original; if grace forsakes it, it is changed into a frightful and hideous spectre.

3dly. Frequently to remember, that you carry the treasure of grace in an earthen vessel; one fall brings it to destruction, perhaps never to be repaired.

4thly. Often to pray to God to preserve you from

dangerous occasions, and never to expose yourself imprudently to them, through fear of perishing in them.

THE COLLOQUY.

O my God, what have I not to bewail and reproach myself with, in regard to grace? Thou didst bountifully bestow it upon me in baptism, I presently lost the valuable treasure. Hardly had the light of reason dawned on my soul, when the darkness of sin overspread it. Perhaps I had the misfortune to live a long time in that lamentable state. If I returned to thee, and was by thee reinstated in thy precious grace, what care did I take to preserve it? With what presumption, on the contrary, did I not expose myself to frequent dangers of losing it again. Have I the happiness of possessing it at present? Shall I keep it to the end of my life? I beg that favour of thee, O my God; it is only from thee, that I can expect it; I hope for it from thy bounty. If thou grantest me that blessing, I have nothing farther to desire upon earth.

SECOND LESSON.

ON CHRISTIAN HOPE.

Hope confounds not.—Rom. v. 5.

We are born in tears, we live in sufferings, we die in pain; such is our course. If the expectation of a more happy fate did not support us, how complete would be our misery? Hope alone can be our strength and support. And behold here two advantages, which it procures us under two kinds of afflictions, which are most distressing to us. It comforts us in the sufferings of this life, it softens to us the rigours of death, and this through the sight and expectation of eternal glory, which it sets before our eyes. Let us then open our hearts to this pleasing hope, which is capable of alleviating the hardships of our banishment, by pointing out to us the happy prospect of our heavenly country.

1st. Hope comforts us in all the sufferings of life. The world generally gives us only subjects of trouble and uneasiness. Alas! what is our life upon earth? We do not seem to have come into the world, but to suffer: afflictions and troubles spring up under our feet; we walk in a path strewed with crosses, and beset with thorns; we are fed with the bread of tears; we number our days by our misfortunes; every moment we behold the torrent of our afflictions swell by the addition of new sorrows, and contradictions; they pour in from all sides upon us. All things contribute to make our lives hourly more unhappy; our relations abandon us, our friends betray us, our projects miscarry; within ourselves what troubles, what uneasinesses, what alarms, what hidden anxieties prey on our minds and hearts? Our health decays, our body is weakened, a thousand infirmities assault it.

All men must suffer; it is the common lot of the children of Adam from the cradle to the grave, from the sceptre to the crook: we suffer at all times, in all conditions; each one has his cross; and if the voice of all afflicted men throughout the universe could be heard, we should be stunned with the melancholy concert of cries, groans, sighs rising from every side, from the midst of families, from the centre of palaces, and filling the air with their lamentable sounds. Afflicted fathers, disconsolate mothers, wives drowned in tears, bodies worn out with illness, poor in want, prisoners in their shackles, fill the stage of this world, and set forth the miseries, to which man is condemned during the course of his mortal life.

God of bounty, is it for this, that thou hast placed us in the world, and in the midst of so great darkness wilt thou send forth no ray of comfort to us? Come, healing Hope, the only remedy of our evils, the only solace in our afflictions, come and soothe the rigour of our distresses. In effect, if Christian hope comes to our assistance, and in the midst of our sufferings presents to us the happiness, which we expect hereafter; if it discloses to us the thrones, crowns, and joys,

which are prepared for us in eternity, when the darkness of time shall be dispersed, and the moment of our trial over; ah! then our mind recovers its calm, our heart begins to enjoy peace, serenity returns to our soul. What a solid fund of comfort is experienced, when we can say to ourselves: I suffer, it is true, in this life, but I hope for a better; I weep in this world, but I am made for heaven; all things here will end, pleasure and pain, joys and trouble; why should I be elated with one, or cast down by the other? A day will come, when no traces either of one or the other will remain; when the measure of passing afflictions shall be filled up, true enjoyments will succeed never to have an end. O day of eternity, which hope sets before my eyes, how able art thou to sweeten my sufferings, and dry up my tears? Perhaps that great day will soon dawn upon me; I behold it coming, I expect it, I hope for it; I am to arrive at length at my heavenly country, my business at present is to bear the toils of my pilgrimage and banishment, through which I must pass. Let this fleeting and perishable life therefore be spent in tears and afflictions, provided I am one day admitted to a better, to a durable and eternal life. In this pleasing hope my sufferings, so far from being heavy and unwelcome, become light and and comfortable to me.

Christian hope, these are the sweets, which thou promisest me after presenting me with the cup of bitterness; I drink it off dregs and all to the very bottom, and I only find a pleasing sweetness.

2dly. But if Christian hope affords such comfort in the afflictions of life, how much greater will be its efficacy in strengthening us against the alarms and terrors of death? Death generally is only represented under the gloomy appearances of solitude, forsaking, destruction, annihilation; because we only consider it according to the darkness of time; but if Christian hope opens our eyes, and withdrawing the veil that covers them, displays to us the pleasing prospect of an extensive and everlasting futurity, then all things

change their aspect, every thing is seen in a different light; hope comforts, strengthens and encourages man in all, and death presents to him no longer those terrors, which it before had; because, in effect, what he loses by dying is little in comparison of what he expects; what he regrets being deprived of, does not in any degree diminish the object of his hope. If in this imaginary solitude God remains with him, he has lost nothing, he soon recovers all, and will go to enjoy all in God.

The idea of destruction is not only the falsest but most injurious to Christian hope. So far from being destroyed and annihilated by death, it is, on the contrary, then that we begin to live; the moment of death is to us the true beginning of life; we quit a mortal and perishable life to enjoy a lasting and immortal one; at our birth our soul came to this earthly dwelling as into a prison, at death the prison is opened, and the soul enters into the liberty of the children of God. Death is a sweet sleep, which brings us to true rest; the happy term, which finishes our banishment amongst the dead to give us admittance to the company of the living.

Such is our own situation at death, and such also is that of our dearest friends, when death takes them from us. Enlightened with these principles of faith, and animated with this comfortable hope, I enter into a house, which has just been visited by death. I find the friend, the widow, the father, the son of the deceased drowned in tears; death has snatched from them a person whom they loved. Why, say I to them, are you thus afflicted at your loss? Why do you regard death according to the dark views of this world without considering it in respect to eternity, which hope points out to you? Tender child, thou hast lost a father; no, he is not lost, he has ended his journey, he has arrived at the term of his career, he is gone to our common father, he is praying for thee. A friend has lost his friend, yet he is not lost for ever; they are separated for awhile; but the friend hopes soon to meet his friend again; God is the tie, that will unite them together for

ever. A mother has lost her son; but is he lost without redress? No, she sees him living in God himself: he came forth from her womb to live upon earth, he is entered into the bosom of God to live there for ever. A spouse has lost her husband; why does she abandon herself to inconsolable grief? Her husband is not lost, he is gone before her to prepare the way for her; he waits for her in the land of immortality there to be eternally reunited to her. O, disconsolate widow, behold him calling upon thee from the highest heavens; he stretched forth his arms with eagerness to receive thee in the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom.

Attend then to these words of the Apostle: *We will not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that you be not sorrowful, even as others, who have no hope.* 1 Thess. iv. 12.—Listen to the language, which hope speaks to you: contemplate the term, to which it calls you; see the place, which it prepares for you; the crown, that it presents you; and in the pleasing expectation thereof look upon afflictions as graces on crosses as favours, on passing evils as a source of true blessings, on death as a passage to an immortal and everlasting life.

God of goodness, it is on thy own promises, that this hope is grounded; strengthen it in us by faith; enliven it with charity; make us support it by prayer and good works, by a holy confidence in thy goodness, and by a total abandoning of ourselves into the hands of thy providence. As yet a few years of conflict and trial upon earth, and we shall enter victorious and triumphant into heaven.

The Confident Address of a Christian Heart to God.

I hope in you, O my God; Holy, bountiful, Powerful God; in you alone I hope. In whom beside can I put my trust? Not in my own merits; they are none. What, alas, am I in your sight but misery and sin? So far from filling me with confidence, my life presents me nothing but a subject of diffidence and fear.

I rely not on the world ; I have but too fatally experienced its perfidiousness and deceit. How many have trusted to it, and fallen victims to its treachery? So far from making men happy or holy, does not the world make its followers miserable here, and reprobates hereafter ?

I will not put my trust in the support of men. Unhappy he, who relies on an arm of flesh. Feeble mortals are incapable of doing much for themselves: what can they do to promote the happiness of others? They live to-day, to-morrow they are no more. What help is to be expected from frail dust and ashes?

In you then alone I can and must hope, O my God ; in you I find solid motives and unshaken grounds of confidence.

I hope in your infinite mercy ; I have abused it, I know ; but I likewise know, that its treasures are inexhaustible. Many sinners, like myself, have also abused it, and yet have not been rejected by you, when they came to fling themselves into your arms. A David stained with murder, a sinful Magdalene, a guilty Manasses, a penitent Augustine, will remain eternal monuments of your unbounded mercy. Truly if it were not infinite, should we not all be lost without redress ? God of bounty, make me experience the effects of this infinite mercy ; you can only exercise it during my life ; after death will be the reign of your justice alone ; have pity therefore on my soul, whilst I yet breathe ; your justice will have the whole length of eternity to punish ; pardon, whilst there is time, and show by pardoning, that you are great in goodness, as by chastising hereafter you will show for ever, that you are just and dreadful in your punishments.

Again I hope, and hope through the merits of Jesus Christ. In him is the secure foundation of my confidence. Adorable Saviour, when I think of all that thou hast done and suffered for me, how can I not hope in thee?

When I see that thou camest down from heaven to save sinners ; when I reflect, that thou only livedst on

this earth to draw all men to thyself; when I enter into thy temples, and by the eyes of faith perceive that thou art daily offered, as a victim, on our altars for us; but above all, when I go up in spirit to Calvary, and see thy precious blood flowing abundantly on sinners, to purchase their redemption, thy adorable heart pierced through, and opened to receive them, thy last sighs sent forth to heaven to draw down the grace of repentance and reconciliation on them, how can so many powerful arguments, and proofs of thy mercy fail of rousing my confidence, and banishing all fear and apprehensions from my heart? God of goodness, save those souls, which have cost thee so dear, and lose not the fruit of thy sufferings, of thy blood and death.

I know, O my God, that to prevent my hope being vain and presumptuous I must back it with good works, and support it with a faithful correspondence with thy grace. Thou createdst me without my help, but thou wilt not save me without my own concurrence; whence I am determined to labour seriously for the salvation of my soul. Full of trust in thy goodness, I will respect thy law, I will observe thy commandments, I will detest my sins, I will endeavour to wash them away with my tears, I will keep a guard over myself, I will repress the passions of my heart, I will fight against my vicious inclinations, I will be to my neighbour what I wish him to be to me.

With these holy dispositions, which are inspired by thy grace, I will continue to hope in thee, O my God. Thou art my Father, my Creator, my Redeemer. I hope that thou wilt grant me pardon of my sins, however great they are; yea, the greatness itself of my iniquities, when I detest them, so far from weakening shall rather strengthen and increase my trust; for the greater my sins are in thy sight, the more they forgiveness of them will make known thy goodness, and increase the triumphs of thy grace, I will cry out then with the penitent Prophet: *O Lord, thou wilt pardon my sin; for it is great.* Psalm xxiv. 11.

I hope that thou wilt support me through the miseries and trials of this life, that thou wilt enable me to bear the afflictions and disappointments of it, to submit with resignation to all the dispositions of thy providence over me, whatever they may be; all that happens to me, from thy paternal hand, shall be received with a heart perfectly resigned.

I hope, above all, that thou wilt come to my assistance at the hour of death, that thou wilt not forsake me in the agonies of my passage from time to eternity. It will be chiefly then that I shall stand in need of thy help, that I shall call for thy aid to finish my course in the paths of justice and holiness.

Finally, I hope, that thou wilt grant me thy grace in this life, and glory in the next.

Such are the motives, such the foundation, and such the objects of my confidence in thee, O my God.—Deign to endow it with such qualities, as will render it acceptable in thy sight.

Make it a truly inward hope deeply engraved in the centre of my heart: may not my mouth alone, but all my feelings, say to thee: *In thee, O Lord, have I hoped.* Psalm xxx. 2.

Make it a strong and valiant hope, which nothing shall be able to shake. No; may neither men, nor the world, nor all the powers of hell conspiring against me be able to alter the sentiments of trust, which I place in thee the God of my heart: *in thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded.* Psalm xxx. 2.

Make it a steady and lasting hope, that will abide with me to the end; may it attend me through the agonies of death, and when thou shalt strike the dreadful stroke, may my confidence in thee sanctify the sacrifice of my last breath. Such are the sentiments, in which I wish to live, and with which I hope to die.

O my God, in this strong and pleasing hope, how can I refuse bearing all the afflictions of this present life, in expectation of the immortal life which thou hast prepared for me?

How can I neglect weaning my heart from the per-

ishable things of this world, in expectation of the supreme joys of heaven?

How can I look upon this earth, otherwise, than as a place of banishment, whilst I have my heavenly country in view?

How can I refrain offering for a little while a holy violence to myself to procure a share in the delights of a happy eternity? Beautiful heaven, the term of my ambition, be thou the only object of my wishes, the only desire of my heart, may the purchase of thee be the only employment of my life, and of the few moments I have still left me to long and sigh after my happiness.

I am resolved then, 1st, to place all my confidence in God, that I never may be confounded.

2dly. In all the troubles, sufferings, disappointments, and in the afflicting and distressing events of life, to redouble my confidence in God, and even to hope, if necessary, against hope.

3dly. Though I shall weep and be humbled at the sight of my sins, not to be disheartened at them. I will fear the Lord, but I will hope in him; hope does not banish fear; fear is not inconsistent with hope; both conspire to forward the great work of my salvation.

4thly. To support my confidence by the solid practice of good works, I must hope for every thing relating to my salvation from God, but I must neglect nothing to save myself.

THIRD LESSON.

ON CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

I give you a new commandment; that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another.—John xiii. 34.

CHARITY is the peculiar, and, as it were, the characteristical virtue of Christianity It is the foundation,

the support and embellishment of it ; it contains the spirit, and inspires the true sentiments of the religion of Jesus Christ.

It is an amiable virtue, the union of hearts, the bond of society, the delight and comfort of life.

A sublime virtue, which raises our hearts aloft, gives them admittance into the heart of God himself, and endows them with sentiments of the Divinity.

A comfortable virtue ; what blessings and advantages does it bestow by the peace, union, and concord which it procures ?

A fruitful virtue ; it is the root, from whence all other virtues spring ; they live by it ; itself is the fulfilling of the law.

A heavenly virtue ; its origin is from heaven, it leads us thither, it makes us, as it were, citizens of that blessed mansion, it secures us the possession of it.

But above all, an absolutely necessary and indispensable virtue, if we wish to be Christians, to follow the spirit of the gospel, and be ranked with the children of God. Without charity there is no salvation ; a want of charity is one of the greatest marks of reprobation.

On these accounts what have not the Apostles declared to us concerning this great virtue ? What encomiums do they bestow upon it ? With what care do they inculcate it ? With what fidelity did they practise it ? St. John, who by way of excellence is called the Apostle of Charity, devotes all the effusions of his heart to it : *Dearly beloved, let us love one another*, (1 John iv. 7.) was his favourite harangue. St. Paul displays all the heat of his zeal in favour of this virtue ; *bear ye one another's burdens.* Gal. vi. 2.—The primitive Christians are praised for their union and mutual love : *the multitude of the believers had but one heart, and one soul.* Acts iv. 32.

But in particular, Jesus Christ himself inculcates the precept of charity to us, as his own commandment, and as what he always had most at heart : *this is my commandment, that you love one another.* John xv. 12.—He moreover announces it to us as a new

commandment, and a peculiar one of the new covenant; *I give you*, says he, *a new commandment*. John xiii. 34.—But how is it new? Is not charity as old as the world? It is true, that charity in general, and in some sense, is as ancient as the world; but Christian charity, such as Jesus Christ commands, is a new commandment, both as to the spirit of it, and the perfection to which he has carried it.

From whence it follows, that Christian charity is a new virtue, and wholly divine, taking these terms in the literal and strictest signification, and to the full extent and force of the expressions.

A new and divine virtue as to its author; it is Jesus Christ himself, who has taught, recommended, and expressly commanded it, by a precept, which he peculiarly, calls his own: *this is my commandment*. John xv. 12.

A new and divine virtue in its object. It is Jesus Christ, whom we love in our neighbour, and in the person of our neighbour we consider Jesus Christ himself: *as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me*. Matt. xxv. 40.

A new and divine virtue in its model; we must love one another, but we must love one another, as Jesus Christ loved us, and with the same love with which he loved us: *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you*. John xiii. 34.

A new and divine virtue in its extent; *you have heard, that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy*. Matt. v. 44.—*But I, says* Jesus Christ, *say to you, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you*. It is only thus, that you shall become *the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to shine upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust*. Matt. v. 45.

Let us then proclaim Christian charity to be so noble a virtue, that it takes its origin in the heart of God himself; that it sanctifies all the feelings of the heart of man; that the practice of it *is the fulfilling of the*

law ; Rom. xiii. 10.—that he, in whom charity abides, abides himself in the bosom of God : *he that abideth, in charity, abideth in God, and God in him :* 1 John iv. 16,—and that as charity *covereth the multitude of sins*, (1 Pet. iv. 8.) so it comprises all virtues and the perfection of the law : *he, that loveth his neighbour, has fulfilled the law.* Rom. xiii. 8.

At the same time so necessary a virtue, that without it religion rewards no other; so necessary, that it is the peculiar and characteristical marks of a true Christian, distinguishing the disciple of Jesus Christ from him who is not: *by this shall all men know, that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another ;* John xiii. 35.—so necessary, that as he, who has charity, abides in God, and has the principle of spiritual life in him, so the man, who is not in charity, dwells not in God, but is in a state of damnation and death : *he that loveth not, abideth in death ;* 1 John iii. 14.—finally so necessary a virtue, that though we had power of working miracles, though we should *remove mountains, or deliver* our bodies into the hands of tyrants to be racked or *burnt*, if we had *not charity*, (1 Cor. xiii.) we should be as empty ciphers in the sight of God, or else objects of his wrath, smitten with his anathemas, and exposed to all the severity of his indignation : *If I have not charity, I am nothing.* John v. 2.

Have we ever duly considered, what charity is in the sight of God, and in the eyes of faith? At present we know its heavenly excellence; we comprehend the absolute and indispensable necessity of it; let us consider what are and ought to be its true characteristical marks.

They are to be taken from the sample of Jesus Christ, being traced on to us with his own hand, and, as it were, sealed with his blood : *love one another as I have loved you.* John xiii. 34.

MEDITATION.

ON THE CHARACTERISTICAL MARKS OF CHARITY.

Christian Charity to be true and genuine must have three qualities; it must be supernatural in its motive, universal in its object; it must show itself by its works, without which it is unknown to Religion and rejected by God himself.

My God, God of mercies, whose heart is sweetness and bounty, and whose bowels are charity and tenderness, teach me to know and practice a virtue, which is the peculiar virtue of your children.

1st Point. Charity must be supernatural in its motive. We must love our neighbour for God, and only with a view to God. We love our neighbour, but it is oftentimes with a natural love, and from motives wholly human. Whence so much false and defective charity, which is rejected by God.

We love our neighbour, because he has a kind of sympathy of humour and inclination with ourselves; because he is entertaining; because he pleases us, because he does us good, because he can, and we are in expectation of his bestowing some favour on us. This is not loving, as a Christian; a moral Pagan may love in this manner, and carry the affections of his heart thus far. Being disciples of Jesus Christ, let us imitate him in our love, and conceive the sentiments worthy of him. Let us comprehend the essential difference there is between charity and sympathy, between charity and natural inclination, between charity and gratitude, between charity and interest, between charity and policy, between charity and connexions of flesh and blood, and the immense distance of one from the other. We never shall love our neighbour as Christians, as long as we love any thing else in him besides God, or what is not at least loved for God's sake; that is, as long as we do not regard in the person of our neighbour the person of Jesus Christ himself, from whom our charity must spring as from its source, and to whom it must be directed as to its last end.

You loved us, O adorable Saviour, but with what kind of love? You loved us with a love wholly supernatural and divine. No other motive interested you in our behalf, than your own goodness, and the glory of your heavenly Father. Such is the example you set us; but we, far from following this great lesson, often either have no love at all, or else only a purely human, natural and profane love. A thousand unworthy motives degrade our affections; a thousand earthly considerations corrupt our charity. We seek ourselves in all things, in our fancies, our humours, our temporal interest; you have no part in our affections. What recompense can we expect for such love? In lieu of reward have we not often reason to apprehend punishment?

2d Point. Charity must be universal in its object. Our charity must extend to all persons without exception, because all men are comprised under the name and character of neighbour. Nothing is so boundless, and at the same time nothing so limited, as the human heart. It carries its affections to a thousand foreign, and often dangerous objects, and it refuses its regard to things, which ought to be dear and respectable to it. By the principles of religion we should consider this vast universe as the house of God, all men as a great family, whereof God is the father, and of which we are the children; and of consequence we are bound to love all in God, as in a common parent. From this consideration, what union would be cemented between the hearts of men? What peace, and concord would reign throughout the world?

But what, O my God, is the real fact? Our charity is restrained and limited to a certain number of choice persons, and all others are regarded as strangers and indifferent to us.

Many ask the question, how it is possible to love all men, whilst many are so little amiable in their characters, so imperfect and so unreasonable. This man is hasty and impatient, that passionate and ill-tempered, a third is of a wild and capricious dispo-

sition; what means of loving them, whilst even they can hardly be borne with? That other has a vicious turn of mind, a bad heart, without feeling and without gratitude; his humour is so perverse, so peevish, and so exotic, that even an angel could not agree with him. What reasons of this kind are not daily alleged to excuse a want of charity towards certain persons?

But they are all vain pretexts, deceitful illusions, which charity reprobates and condemns. We do not require a sensible and feeling love for our neighbour, which often does not depend on us, but a solid and sincere charity, which religion inspires. In this sense we are bound to love our neighbour, and by our neighbour all men are understood in spite of their imperfections, faults and even vices, as Jesus Christ loved us, notwithstanding our many weaknesses and defects.

Let us take an universal survey of all men, let us search out for one, who is not the work of God, not the image of God, not redeemed with the blood of God, and we will allow you not to love that man; but if all men are the work of God, and redeemed with the blood of Jesus Christ, all men must be loved without exception, and if you make an exception of one, it is Jesus Christ himself, whom you exclude from your love.

On this principle, O my God, what have I not to fear and reproach myself with in regard to charity? Can I call by that name the dispositions, which I have hitherto harboured towards so many persons, for whom I have had nothing but indifference and insensibility, perhaps even disgust and aversion? I reserve my heart for certain persons, others have no share in it; You love them, but they are foreign to me; You recommend them to my regard, and I overlook them; You command me to love them, and I fancy, that I do a great deal in not hating them. Are these dispositions then that charity, of which you have laid the commandment on me, a commandment so positive in its obligation, and so universal in its extent? Dilate

my heart, O my God, open the bosom of my charity to all men, who are the work of your hands, the object of your mercy, and the price of your adorable blood.

3d Point. Our charity must show itself by its works. If charity consisted in words, never was there an age more charitable than the present. Never were there so many promises, so many demonstrations of friendship, so many offers of service, so many protestations of zeal and attachment; in a word, so much apparent charity. Nevertheless the poor suffer, the sick groan, the afflicted sigh; we know and see their situation; and yet abandon them to their lot; and still we say, that we love our neighbour, and have charity. No; charity does not consist in words, but in works. There is a resemblance between faith and charity: *without works* charity is dead, as *faith* also is *dead.* James ii. 20.—Let us adopt a beneficial charity, which shows itself by works, which speaks by our actions, not by our tongues; which presents real, not empty offers of service, and even, if necessary, is ready to sacrifice itself for others. Thus Jesus Christ loved us; thus he commands us to love one another. There are poor, let us solace them; there are sick, let us give them assistance; there are persons in affliction, let us administer comfort to them; there are ignorant men, let us instruct them; in a word, there are works of mercy, let us put them in practice; therein true and solid charity consists.

Let us have a compassionate charity; be far from us all hardness and insensibility of heart. We must, according to the example of St. Paul, *weep with them that weep,* (Rom. xii. 15.) take share in the miseries of our fellow creatures, compassionate and alleviate their distresses. *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I am not on fire.* 2 Cor. xi. 29.

Let us remember, that we are Christians, and disciples of a God suffering and dying for us. It is at the foot of the cross, that we must gather Christian sentiments, and be animated with Christian charity.

O Christian charity, sublime and amiable virtue, how precious art thou in the sight of God? but how little art thou known amongst men, how little practised by Christians? Thou oughtest to unite all Christian hearts and preserve them in peace, and yet they are daily made the sport of divisions, wranglings, heats, dissensions, anger, animosities, and quarrels. Christians stand against Christians, relations against relations, families against families, states against states. O charity, in what land wilt thou find shelter, if Christianity is itself a country unknown to thee? All men should live together as brothers, being children of one common Father, to assist, edify, and promote the sanctification of each other; and they have only intercourse to disquiet, torment, and tear one another in pieces, and thereby contribute to each other's ruin and damnation. The disturbance of society, breaches of friendship, and divisions among Christians, are the fatal and melancholy effects of the outrages that are daily offered to charity, and which banish it from our land.

Adorable Saviour, is it for this, that you came down on earth? Being the common Father of us all, you wished to carry all your children in your bosom; and as the faithful shepherd of the flock, you wished to close all your sheep within the same fold. You were offered a precious victim to your eternal Father, and devoted to death to give us all the life of charity, and the life of divine grace. How strangely do we frustrate your bountiful intentions? By our dispositions can we be acknowledged to be your children?

O men formed to the image of God, let us love one another, let us love sincerely and from our hearts. Let our feelings express our love more than our words. Let us love effectually, and, when occasions offer, testify our love by our deeds. Let our love be universal, without an odious exception of any one. Being Christians and children of God, let us love one another from the affection we bear our common Father. Pagans and infidels, and they who know not the king-

dom of God, may gratify their resentiments, and be torn in pieces with dissensions; let us not live together like strangers, or as persons indifferent or inimical to each other.

Let us love, as Jesus Christ loved us, and as the saints love each other in heaven. Our destiny being to love one another, and to be for ever united together in God, let us love all at present for God's sake and in God.

Let us love one another in this world, that we may love and be loved by all for ever in a happy eternity.

Conclude from the foregoing considerations: 1st. Never to utter, or wilfully allow any word to escape you, which can hurt and afflict your neighbour.

2dly. When any thing is said or done that hurts and afflicts you, not to complain, but to be ignorant of the affront, and let the whole drop.

3dly. To be careful to render service to all men, when you can: not to wait, till your services are asked for by others, but to prevent their wishes, particularly if they are persons at whom you have reason to be offended.

4thly. To correct those faults, which are a subject of uneasiness and displeasure to others, and more particularly those which gave occasion of disedification and bad example.

5thly. Always to remember, that Jesus Christ is clothed in the person of your neighbour, whom, on that account, you must necessarily learn to respect.

Finally, to recollect frequently what has been said, that as charity is the characteristic of the Elect, and children of God, so a want of charity is the most certain mark of reprobation.

THE COLLOQUY.

Such, O my God, are the sentiments, which I will henceforward harbour towards my neighbour. Kindle the fire of this charity in my heart, and by your grace devote all the affections of it to love.

FOURTH LESSON.

ON OUR PREDOMINANT PASSION.

The lust thereof shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it.—Gen. iv. 7.

We all have passions which sway and tyrannize over us. Our natural dispositions often degenerate into passion. God gave us different feelings to form them to virtue, and we turn those feelings into passion. Each of us carries about him in his heart the root, from whence all passions spring.

Amongst these various and numberless passions there is one which commands the rest: being more strong and lively, more violent and more imperious, it rouses and sets all the rest in motion, as so many different springs, which it makes act, and thus it becomes, as it were, the soul and regulator of them all. This passion is what properly forms our character, our disposition and the complexion of our temper, unless grace come to our assistance to correct it.

This passion is different in different persons, according to the difference of their humours, and natural inclinations. We may say, that the features of the heart are as different, as those of the countenance. Defects are shared differently as well as talents. Every one experiences a different sway of passion; but all men are ruled by some one, more or less strong, more or less violent, yet always domineering, and always a passion. Now, amidst these different passions, to which the generality of mankind is subject, what is the predominant passion of each one in particular? Judge thereof by the following characters, which perhaps will point out your own to you.

In some the predominant passion is ambition. If a soul is infected with this passion, all its thoughts are to advance, to distinguish and raise itself above others. Projects of grandeur, important employs in the world, schemes of raising an opulent fortune, engage all its attention; and hence flow that detestable haughtiness

of mind and heart, those proud looks, those disdainful airs, so remarkable in ambitious men, who never are content with what they are, and are always desirous to be and appear what they are not.

In others the predominant passion is anger, which hurries them out of themselves. It is a fire, which is ready to be kindled into a flame at every moment; they experience in themselves frequent and impetuous sallies of a hot and violent temper; motions of wrath burst forth almost at every instant, and are on the point of setting the world in a conflagration; on the most trifling occasions, for the smallest word, you hear the thunder roar, and see flashes of lightning dart from them.

In this man the predominant passion is a fatal inclination to slander, criticise, blame and condemn all men without sparing any. His tongue, like that of a viper, pours forth bitterness and gall, it rends unmercifully the reputation of others; he goes in search of rumours and scandals, to relate them in company, and, as he imagines, thereby enlivens genteel conversation. Truth and falsehood, certainty and doubt, the absent, the present, the friend, the enemy come all alike to him; nothing is withheld, and no one spared; all things are related by the baneful tongue of detraction, perhaps even blackened with forgery and malicious slander.

In that man a fund of sloth, negligence, and indolence, is the predominant passion, so that nothing can rouse and draw him from his lethargy. Sunk in the bosom of indolence he does nothing, he is employed about nothing, he is capable of nothing. Days and weeks pass without knowing in what and how; he is always forming projects and never proceeding. In the meanwhile the duties of his state are neglected, his children are without education, his servants without rule, his affairs and whole family in disorder. Is it living to live thus almost without action, without sentiment, and without a soul?

How many other different passions sway different

men? A base covetousness, degrading the heart, a fund of self love, seeking itself in all things; a fatal itching for talking, without knowing any restraint; an extravagant sensibility, touched and exasperated at every thing; a weak regard to the judgments of the world, making them slaves of the fancies and capricious humours of other men? What are all these, but a sad and fatal assemblage of defects, vices and passions, which are gathered together under the standard, and guided by the direction of the predominant passion?

Such, and still more numerous, are the different passions, which rule and tyrannize over the heart of man. Nothing is so essential, and, at the same time, perhaps nothing so difficult, as to know the particular passion by which each one is governed; because this artful passion disguises itself a thousand ways; it conceals and hides itself under a thousand covers, sometimes even under the shadow of good, and appearance of virtue itself.

That vain and ambitious man, who is wholly swayed by a secret desire of appearing in the world, knows not his own defect, because at the same time he takes share in all the good works that are on foot, and is not sensible, that he is making use of those very good works to feed his pride and vanity. That other, who is linked in suspicious and dangerous connexions, has no mistrust of them, because he finds his heart inclined to good, and feels, as it were, a natural disposition to piety. The hasty and choleric man is again without fear, because motions for fervour, and zeal for good works, are seen to mix with his anger. The indolent and slothful believes himself faultless, because he is quiet and peaceful, does some good, and speaks well of all. Thus men throw a deceitful veil over their predominant passion; under the cover of an apparent good, which seduces them, they harbour real evils, which are working their ruin.

Does it not moreover often happen, that they are afraid of being enlightened and knowing their passion, lest the knowledge of it should put them under a

necessity of conquering it? No, I do not hesitate to aver, that if it is difficult to take the features of the countenance, it is more so to delineate the heart; and, excepting some certain passions, which are so striking and visible, that they can neither be disguised from ourselves or others; there is nothing in which we are more commonly and easily overseen, than the passion which is most predominant in us.

Are you then desirous of discovering an enemy, whom it is of such importance for you not to mistake? Listen to St. Chrysostom; These, says he, are the marks, by which you shall discern this most cunning and dangerous adversary, who is lurking in your own heart. Your predominant passion is: 1st. That, which is the most usual cause and source of your other faults and sins.

2dly. That, which disturbs most the peace of your soul, and which occasions the most frequent remorses and uneasy reflections.

3dly. That, which is the most usual matter of your confessions, and of which you are obliged most frequently to accuse yourself.

4thly. That, which gives occasion to the greatest conflicts in your soul, and which you have most repugnance to overcome.

5thly. That, which mostly holds the sway in all your actions, deliberations, projects and intentions.

6thly. That, in a word, which is most importunate, imperious, and untractable; that, which is most deeply riveted in the heart, and most dear to it; for if, when touched on that point, you find yourself touched in the sensible part, it is an evident mark, that there is your predominant passion.

Consider, therefore, whether among the passions of your heart there be any, which bears these characters. Any one of the marks which have been mentioned will point it out to you; but if they all concur and are united, the knowledge of your predominant passion then becomes undoubted. The enemy is discovered, but it is not enough to know him, he must be over-

come. Arm yourself therefore against him, and defer not the engagement, lest he should gain new strength by your delay, and you be no longer able to subdue him, after he has exercised his imperious tyranny over you.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

It is a particular grace you do my soul, O my God, in making known to it its predominant passion. But if the predominant passion is once known, there arises an absolute and indispensable necessity in my soul of fighting against it; for if it declines the combat, the passion will infallibly become a fatal source to it of the greatest disorders, that is to say, a source of sins, a source of blindness, and a source of reprobation.

My God, arm me with courage against so dangerous an enemy, in whose presence I am sensible of my own weakness. As it is only by the light of your grace, that I can know it; so it is only by the help of your grace, that I can vanquish and triumph over it.

1st Point. Our predominant passion is a fatal source of sins. The predominant passion is formed by a sequence of repeated acts of sin multiplied and heaped one upon another; and being once formed, it becomes in its turn still a more fatal source of new sins. Who can declare the many crimes and disorders which are occasioned by a predominant passion, influencing and domineering over the affections of the heart?—Sins of thought, and of simple complacency, sins of desire, sins of evil intentions, sins of action, sins throughout our whole conduct and the details of our lives, which are universally infected by its baneful poison. A single example drawn from holy writ will convince us thereof; let us seriously meditate upon it, and, whilst we are meditating, let us tremble for ourselves.

Solomon was endowed with a superior wisdom beyond all men; he was the model of those, with whom he lived, and the admiration of foreigners; but as

soon as he unfortunately lets his heart be enslaved by a fatal passion, to what disorders, crimes and excesses does it hurry him? Solomon becomes at once unfaithful to his God, ungrateful, voluptuous, impious, an idolater. What horrors, O my God? Unfaithful to thee, he forgets the sacred and solemn promises, which he had so often renewed at the foot of thy altar; through ingratitude he abuses all thy gifts, and turns them against his own benefactor; his voluptuousness makes him plunge himself into all the excesses of a shameful passion, which knows no bounds nor restraint; he is impious, so as to trample under foot the great and sublime maxims of piety and religion, which he before had announced to the world: finally, he prostrates himself as an idolater before false gods, and profanes his incense by offering it to filthy idols on the sacrilegious altars. What plunged him into all these abominations? A passion, which gained the ascendant over him; he neglected to repress it in the beginning; afterwards it became his master: Being once enslaved to a fatal and domineering passion, what wonder that he is the slave of all vices, and abandons himself to all manner of excess?

What is man, O my God, and the wisest of men, if he lets himself be governed by any passion, particularly a domineering one? Alas! I have had but too fatal an experience of it, and whither has not that unfortunate passion often carried me? I cannot think thereof without weeping and being confounded. When man is in this dreadful situation, what becomes of all the lights of reason? What becomes of all the sentiments of faith?

2d Point. Our predominant passion, from being a source of sin, soon becomes a source of blindness. In general there is no darkness so great, as that which is occasioned by passion, and amidst the different passions none blind us so much as the predominant one. As long as we are free from passion our eyes are open and we see; but if passion gets possession of our soul, we see no more; all is darkness, blindness, we run

astray and are lost. The predominant passion closes up our eyes by a thousand false maxims, and groundless prejudices, which it forms; it raises a thick mist around us, in which itself lies hidden, and in the midst of the darkness, that it has occasioned, it becomes the fatal source of innumerable errors, deceits, and illusions of the understanding, of depravity of our affections, and mistakes in our conduct; it beguiles the mind, it perverts the will, it seduces the heart; it overturns the whole system of reason; it does not allow man to judge but by its own false lights, nor to act but by its own seducing impressions; he sees no longer but through the medium of the obscurity which surrounds him; and being surrounded with this darkness, it is inexpressible to what excess of blindness he is carried. But the predominant passion does still more; it not only blinds the sinner in his crimes, but makes him even excuse and justify them. Did the passionate man ever want pretexts to rivet himself in his passion? Did the revengeful man ever fail of reasons to patronise his revenge? Do not the envious always find arguments to justify their envy? How ingenious is the backbiter in inventing pretexts to countenance his detraction? In a word, does not every guilty person cast a veil, or throw a varnish over his conduct, to cover and disguise it? Nevertheless, in the midst of these errors, passions and illusions, doubts and uneasy reflections from time to time arise. Is that inheritance, which I enjoy, lawful? Are those practices, which I follow, just? Is not that familiarity, which I entertain, dangerous? Are not the coolness, which I show to such an one, and the indifference, which I have for such a relation, destructive of charity? Are my confessions sincere? Doubts, uneasinesses and fears arise on a thousand subjects; but presently the predominant passion, as a blinded casuist, gives a peremptory decision, and pronounces all the doubts to be scruples, the uneasiness a false niceness, the fears to be without foundation. No farther inquiry is made; the soul resumes its calm; that is, it casts itself into a voluntary

blindness. But if the predominant passion cannot decide absolutely in its own favour, and entirely do away the doubts that occur, at least it diverts the mind from such considerations as might instruct it in its duties, and remove the illusion; it only allows it to attend to what seems favourable to itself. Thus, O my God, men plunge themselves into illusion, thus they live in error, thus they expose themselves to die in their blindness, and complete their misery for eternity.

3d Point. Our predominant passion finally becomes the cause of our reprobation. Blinded, seduced, and kept in captivity by our predominant passion to the very end, we shall either not repent at all, or else only perform a sham repentance; and what more is required to die impenitent and a reprobate? But it is to be feared, that we shall not repent at all, because, through the blindness of our understanding, we shall flatter ourselves to the very end, we shall always hope, that there is still time to be converted, we shall put off, and defer, and at last be taken unawares, and die in our sins.

Through the attachment which the heart has to its passion, we shall be afraid to break asunder the fatal ties, which we have formed; we shall therefore remain in slavery, as it were fettered, to our last breath, and perhaps this very breath will be drawn to express our regard to the sinful object of our unhappy passion.

By a sad, but dreadful judgment of God, grace, which we have so often rejected, will perhaps be withdrawn from us, or diminished at that time; that heavenly torch will only send forth a faint and glimmering light, which will startle, but not convert us.

The devil, continuing his deceits and illusions, will tempt and assault the sinner, by presenting continually before him the fatal remembrance of the sinful objects, which amused him during life, and which still please and delight him even in death. Perhaps also the violence of his bodily pains and sickness will put him out of a condition of thinking of the deplorable state of his soul, and being incapable of reflecting and entering

into himself, he will sink under the violence of this oppression. When the senses are weakened, the mind overwhelmed, the body languishing, and man hardly any thing more than an emaciated carcass, what possibility is there of his thinking of the great business of his salvation, which demands the whole man, even when he is vigourous and healthy?

Perhaps even, to complete the misery and judgment of the sinner, he will not have a moment given him, to think of himself; some sudden and unforeseen accident will overtake him, and being smitten in an instant by the hand of God, he will be hurried out of this world, before he has leisure to remember, that there is another. Or, if he has time and means of reflecting, will not the sight of his criminal disorders and excesses, in which his unfortunate passion has engaged him, strike him with such horror, that he will fall into lamentable despair, and cry out like another Cain: *My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon;* Gen. iv. 13.—God is too just to grant me forgiveness; I am lost, there is no further mercy for me. But suppose even, that he has time, grace, the use of his senses, a desire of doing penance and returning to God, will his repentance be real? Will his conversion be sincere? Or will it not happen, through a last and most dreadful effect of the passion, which sways and blinds him, that he will fancy he is doing effectual penance, when his repentance is false and deficient, having only the outward appearance of it? Alas! O my God, is it so easy in these last moments of pain and bodily oppression to return to thee, to change the disposition of our heart, in an instant, to form new affections to virtue, when our soul has been so long riveted in its affections to sin, to assume the entire command over a passion, which has tyrannized heretofore in so imperious a manner? Is it so easy to raise the sacred building of sanctity on such hideous ruins? Is there not reason to apprehend, that only imperfect motives will influence the conversion; that slavish fear, human respects, worldly notions of decency, compulsion and

external solicitations, will have more share in it, than grace and true sorrow? Finally, that this outward repentance, so edifying in the eyes of men, who only see the outside, will be a real and consummate impenitence in the sight of God, who views the heart?

It is just, O my God, that that passion, which made the criminal pleasure of man during life, should continue its baleful influence in the hour of death. O predominant passion, how fatal art thou? But, O judgments of God, how are ye to be dreaded? Nevertheless I have let myself be tyrannized over by this passion, and I have exposed myself to the dreadful severity of the divine judgments. O my God, when shall I sufficiently bewail both my crime and my misfortune?

Conclude, from the foregoing considerations: 1st. To look upon thy predominant passion as the greatest enemy thou hast in the world, and which thou must fight against with unrelenting courage.

2dly. Though thou continuest always to fight, to believe that thy passion will only die with thee.

3dly. If thou hast the unhappiness to be lost, that it will be this fatal passion that will cause thy damnation.

4thly. To make it an inviolable rule with thyself to offer some violence to thy passion every day.

5thly. To impose some penance on thyself, whensoever thou findest that thou hast failed in this point.

6thly. Carefully to stifle the first motions of it, the moment thou perceivest them.

7thly. To approach from time to time to the holy sacraments, to beg particular grace of God to conquer thy passions.

8thly. Frequently to examine thy conscience on this head, and see what effects this passion has worked in thee.

THE COLLOQUY.

KEEP me, O my God, from a misery, which so infallibly leads me to the greatest of all miseries. Give

me not up to the intemperate sway of my passions, but particularly preserve me from the tyranny and irregularity of a predominant one. I see the dangers and excesses to which it would lead me, and I sovereignly dread the consequences and miseries of it. It flatters indeed, but at the same time it blinds and ruins me. A thousand demons, which should beset my body, would be less to be dreaded than a single passion, that sways my heart. Grant, O my God, that I may not only know this dangerous enemy, but have grace and strength to fight courageously against it, and root it entirely out. Henceforward may I have no other passion but to serve thee, to love thee, to devote to thee all the affections of my heart. Happy I, if thou deignest to receive that heart after it has been profaned for so long a time by the irregularity of base passions.

FIFTH LESSON.

ON HUMAN RESPECTS.

Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a mortal man, and of the son of man, who shall wither away like grass?—Isaias li. 12.

Human Respects are a base disposition of the soul, which makes it act contrary to the lights of its conscience; an unbecoming weakness, which hinders it from practising good, and induces it to do evil, through fear of displeasing or with a view of pleasing men; an unworthy complaisance, that engages it to betray its own natural sentiments, which it condemns: a servile dependence on, and cringing to the opinions of other men, through a desire of acquiring their esteem, or from an apprehension of incurring their censure.

According to this definition of human respects, we must not only say, that they degrade human reason, but that they are the ignominy and disgrace of religion;

since they reduce Christians to a slavery, which is equally shameful, whether we consider it in itself, in its principle, in its object, or in its universality. O immortal soul of a Christian, blush at so base a servitude, which makes thy religion itself blush for thee.

The slavery occasioned by human respects is shameful in itself. What more servile, and consequently what more shameful, than to make ourselves dependent on and the slaves of others; only to regulate our intentions and actions by the intentions and actions of others; to think, speak, judge, not according to our own lights and views, but according to the lights and views, let us say more properly, according to the fancies and capricious humours of others; to approve of doing good, and not dare to do it; to condemn evil and let ourselves be drawn into it; to see our obligations, and not have resolution to comply with them; hardly to have of ourselves either a thought, light, reason, sentiment, or liberty: or else only to have light to run into darkness, reason to give it up, sentiments to degrade them, liberty to sacrifice it? If there are slaves on earth, are there any more base and contemptible than these?

The slavery of human respects is shameful in its principle: for from what do human respects proceed, but from an unworthy weakness of mind, or from a more unworthy baseness of heart? Ah! if we possessed that firmness of soul, that nobleness of sentiment, which reason, and much more religion inspires, should we be guilty of such excesses of weakness and cowardice, and when the world would enslave and tyrannize over us, should we not cry out with the noble generosity of the Apostle: *with me it is a very small thing to be judged by you?* 1 Cor. iv. 3.—Unjust world, what does it import, whether thou accuses or justifiest me? It is not at thy tribunal, that I am to be judged; it is from the sovereign Judge that I expect the equity of my sentence. Thou art often guided by prejudices, fancy, error, illusion; thy balance is deceitful; never shalt thou model my sentiments, nor

be the regulator of my conduct. Thus would a free mind, and a soul, which feels its own greatness, think and speak: and in thinking and speaking thus, it would even command the esteem and respect of the world; for the world, depraved as it is, still knows what to think of such persons. But what opinion does it form of, and with what eye does it regard those weak men, who neither belong to God nor the world, those double-hearted Christians, those ambiguous soldiers, who are ready to join any part? They are not only condemned, but even detested by the world itself.

But besides a weakness of mind, the principle of human respects betrays a baseness of heart. Being subject to God as your sovereign, and more particularly belonging to him as your Redeemer, you are his by every title. You are his work, his inheritance, his disciple, his child. In virtue of these prerogatives he has raised you to a holy liberty and a noble independence of the world, peculiar to his own children; but being placed so high, you descend from the sublime station to which he raised you, and basely profane the eminent qualities, with which you are dignified. Instead of declaring openly for your benefactor, and courageously espousing his interests, you betray his cause, you give up your glorious liberty, which was purchased you by the toils and blood itself of a God-man, and you make the renunciation only to pay your homage to filthy idols. Are the most abject slaves greater slaves than you are?

Again, the object of human respects renders our slavery most shameful. There are certain things, in which we may laudably yield; there are certain points, wherein, through condescension and deference, we may give up something to others, and put ourselves to some inconvenience. I say still further, slavery itself in some light is tolerable, and even in some just and commendable. But in what concerns religion, faith, conscience, salvation, that is, in things, in which it is necessary to preserve our freedom, and where God himself respects our liberty, to yield and give up our

right, is vilifying our character, and carrying shame and ignominy to its greatest height. Let a certain indulgence be used, where things are susceptible of temperament, we may and oftentimes ought to use it; but to allow ourselves to be ruled in essential points, to be subject in things, which are not susceptible of subjection, to depend in matters, which are most inimical to dependency, is sacrificing, I do not say our liberty, but reason and the very feelings of humanity itself.

Finally, the slavery induced by human respects is shameful on account of its universality. For to whom at length do we become subject? Of how many persons do human respects make us the unhappy slaves? Other slaves usually have but one master: let him be unjust, cruel, tyrannical, they have but one; whereas the slaves of human respects have as many masters as there are persons, whose discourses they fear, whose approbation they seek, whose censure they dread. Still farther: they have not only as many masters as there are persons, of whom they stand in awe, but as many as these persons themselves have passions. For from the moment a man seeks to content others, he must carefully study all their dispositions, he must become dependent on them; he must be their slave and the slave of their humours, even to the most abject degree. He is no longer master of himself; he dissembles, he betrays his own sentiments, he affects to have the sentiments of others, he dares not appear what he is, and would seem to be what he is not; he even trembles before those, whose favour he courts, and stands, as it were, stupified in their presence.

When I contemplate those Christians, who are governed by human respects, I fancy to myself that I am beholding those contemptible idols, of which the Prophet speaks, and which he insults with such bitter irony: *They have mouths, and speak not; they have eyes, and see not. They have hands, and feel not; they have feet, and walk not.* Psalm cxiii. 5, 6, 7.—A truly natu-

ral, but humbling representation of those animated statues, who are moved and governed by base human respects. They have tongues and dare not speak, or only utter their words faltering; they have ears and dare not hear, or only listen to applaud; they have eyes and see not by themselves, or else see, as if they did not see; they neither see the indignity of their own conduct, nor the baseness of their sentiments, nor the degradation of their nature. A thousand times more to be pitied, than those unhappy men to whom nature has refused the benefit of corporal light; degraded beneath their own species, and prevaricating from the character of Christians, they have a mind, and it is enslaved; they have reason, and it is debased; they have lights, and they are stifled; they have a soul, and it is grovelling on earth. Shameful servitude, which reason condemns, which our own natural feelings disapprove, which the law forbids, which the world censures, which paganism itself detests.

O God, how just is thy judgment, which thus allows men enslaved to human respects to be vilified before men themselves, whilst they are seeking their esteem, and to fall under a far more heavy and insupportable yoke, whilst they are striving to shake off the sweet and light yoke of Jesus Christ?

Let us at length free ourselves from so great a slavery, let us burst our chains asunder, and shake off our fetters. Being children of God, let us set ourselves at liberty from the slavery of men; too long we have groaned under the tyranny of human respects; let us observe the law of God with that holy freedom, which religion inspires. What are men, and what can they do for us? When we shall be cited to the tribunal of God, will men be able to shelter us from the rigour of his inexorable justice? Let us ever remember that we are only accountable to God for our conscience. Little will it import, what the judgments of men are, if God stands our friend: *if God be for us, who is against us?* Rom. viii. 31.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

If I contemplated the vice of human respects with the eyes of faith, what horror should conceive of it? I should truly say, that from the base sentiments it inspires, and the fatal effects it produces, it is a kind of apostacy in every Christian, and a species of persecution raised in the bosom of Christianity itself. What horror of it ought this idea alone to imprint in me?

O my God, enlighten me with your heavenly light to know this vice, and arm me with strength and courage to resist it.

1st Point. The vice of human respects, from the base sentiments which it inspires, becomes in Christians a kind of apostacy from their faith. The most essential act of faith, and what should characterize all true faith and religion, is to give God the absolute preference to the creature, to raise in our hearts a throne for God above all creatures, to sacrifice for God, whensoever necessary, all earthly concerns and attachments to creatures, to make an open and avowed profession of the true religion, and faithfully and generously to comply with the obligations of it. This is the peculiar exercise of religion. By a contrary rule, to compare the creature with God; in practice to give the creature the preference to God, to sacrifice the interest, glory and service of God to the interest of the creature, is in the eyes of God a kind of renunciation of faith, and a shameful apostacy from religion. Nevertheless, is not this the very effect, which, to the scandal of Christianity, human respects produce in a soul, which is governed by them?

On one hand, O my God, you make known your will to us, you intimate your orders; and on the other, the world and libertines draw us from the execution of them. On one side, you promise us your grace, and friendship, if we obey; on the other, the impious threaten us with their scoffs and censures, if we are faithful to you.

Being therefore reduced to the indispensable necessity of deciding between the two parties, and declaring either for one or the other, through a base complaisance, a false shame and servile fear, we prefer the service of creatures to yours, we chose to displease you, rather than displease men, we had rather incur your disgrace and anger, than expose ourselves to the censure and raillery of the world. Is not this in reality preferring the creature to the Creator? Of consequence is it not, in some sort, shamefully apostatizing from our faith?

Alas! notwithstanding the small share of religion, which we still retain, we cannot forbear trembling and blushing for the outrages done to our faith, when we read or hear of those weak and unworthy Christians, who in early times of Christianity renounced their religion to escape from persecution, and, to the shame of their baptism, preferred a perishable life to a glorious death. We justly condemn them as their conduct was truly base and criminal. But is not the apostacy occasioned by human respects equally or still more criminal and detestable in your eyes, O my God?—Those unhappy men dishonoured their faith, they betrayed their religion, it is true; but they renounced it in the midst of torments through the fear of racks and tortures: their bodies were torn in pieces, their limbs trickled down with blood, and they could say, and said in effect, when touched by the grace of God, they came to ask pardon of the Church: we are perfidious sinners, we own it, and we bewail our guilt; but it was the dread of torments that made us fall, the weakness of our flesh did not second the ardour of our courage. We have sinned, we come to crave pardon: distressing situation! But if, notwithstanding the plausible excuses offered by these unhappy men, with tears in their eyes, the Church still did not fail to treat them with severity, because in effect they had dishonoured their faith, with what eye, O my God, must you regard me, when, through a shameful and unhappy complaisance to men, I renounce the duties of my religion?

What an insult do I thereby offer to my faith? What scandal do I give to the faithful? Yet I have offered this insult, and given this scandal every time, that I have let myself to be overcome by human respects, that I have blushed at the name of a Christian, and through a weak compliance with the world I have trespassed against the holy law of God. Can I sufficiently bewail my situation? Can I atone enough to God for the baseness of my conduct towards him?

2d Point. Consider that from the fatal effects produced by human respects, we may truly say, that they raise a persecution in the bosom of the Church to destroy it; that they are the followers of a Nero and Diocesian, and of those other monsters of iniquity raised up by hell for the destruction and annihilation of religion. Yes, the persecution of human respects is a thousand times more to be dreaded, more fatal, and more dangerous, than the persecutions of those ancient tyrants ever were. Those were raised by pagans; the persecution of human respects comes from Christians themselves. Those only ruined the body, human repects attack the soul. Those tyrants of ancient times made martyrs; human respects made apostates. O the fatal effects of human respects! What sad examples have we seen thereof, O my God, and with what awful fear ought we to be penetrated at the sight of these examples? St. Peter loved you as his divine master; he was sincerely attached to you, he would rather die, than forsake you; and would he not have remained faithful, if human respects had not found their way to his heart? Are you not the disciple of that Man, says a simple maidservant to him? No more is requisite; his mouth is closed up, or only left open to lies, curses and perjury; human respects make him sacrifice at once gratitude, conscience, and affection.

Alas! when I contemplate with trembling and horror, the most shocking and detestable of all crimes; *viz.* deicide itself, the death of a God, do I not find that human respects were in part of the source and cause of it? Pilate was convinced of the innocence of the Son

of God ; he declared, that he found no cause of death in him ; and though the people assembling tumultuously insisted on his condemnation, he still persisted in his resolution of not imbruing his hands in innocent blood. But no sooner were human respects called in to support the unjust demand, and the people intimated to Pilate that by his refusal, he would incur the displeasure of Cæsar, he immediately yielded up the cause ; fear got the better of every other consideration ; human respects dictated the sentence ; hatred and fury carried it into execution. Spotless Lamb, art thou then sacrificed, and is thy blood poured forth in streams on the earth to do homage to human respects ? Dreadful as are the crimes of murder, parricide, deicide, where base human respects get the ascendant, all are to be perpetrated in compliance with their unjust demands.

I tremble, O my God, when I consider the horrible crimes and excesses, in which souls are daily plunged, when they shamefully give themselves up to be governed by human respects. Does this vice leave in them either a sentiment of honour, a mark of the fear of God, or the smallest trace of faith and religion? No. And to what are honour, conscience and religion sacrificed? To the filthy idol of human respects, which merits only contempt and indignation. Can we without weeping, O my God, see so many souls led into error, so many precious victims torn from you by the world, the sacred character of Christians vilified and degraded, and every sentiment of goodness stifled in their hearts, by means of human respects ? And shall we still bend the knee before this shameful idol, and bring ignominy and disgrace on our religion, which ought a thousand times to have overturned and broken it in pieces to exalt itself on its ruins ?

My God, I regret and bewail the effects of human respects in others, and I myself have had the unhappiness to be so often ruled by them. What have I not to reproach myself with in this regard, and how culpable must I appear in your eyes ? Not to displease men, I have chosen to displease you ; I have neglected prac-

tising the good, which I approved ; I have done the evil, which I condemned ; I appeared to be what I was not ; I feared to appear what I was : I dared to seem impious, and I was ashamed of passing for a Christian. I made my own judgment, my liberty, my conscience, my religion itself, the slaves of the fancies and opinions of others, oftentimes of the most capricious humours and passions. I am a Christian, and have been ashamed of my God ; I was afraid of appearing to belong to his service. What infamy and baseness ? Have I then forgot, that *no man can serve two masters ;* Matth. vi. 24.—and that *he who is not with* Christ, *is against* him ? Matth. xii. 30.

Conclude, from the foregoing considerations : 1st. Always to remember, that you carry the sign of a Christian engraved on your forehead, and that it ought to be more deeply engraved in your heart.

2dly. Whenever you are in danger of being led astray by human respects, to recollect, that an occasion is presented you of making an open profession of your faith.

3dly. To reflect, that they, who do evil, should blush, not they, who do well.

4thly. To declare yourself openly and courageously in behalf of your duty in the first occasions that present themselves, as you will thereby acquire more strength and graces afterwards.

5thly. In occasions of more dangerous assaults from human respects, to remember that dreadful threat of Jesus Christ: *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his glory, and in that of his Father, and of the Angels,* Luke ix. 26.

THE COLLOQUY.

Ah ! Lord, my resolution is taken ; I am determined to shake off the base and ingominious yoke. Long enough, yea, too long, have I groaned under the slavery of the world and tyranny of human respects. I felt

the weight of my yoke, it appeared burdensome to me; but I had not resolution to withdraw my neck from under it, and set myself at liberty. No, my God, whatever may happen to me, I will no more betray my conscience and the feelings of my heart, by renouncing my duty to you through the fear of men. What do I say? It is not sufficient to forbear trespassing against my duty to you ; I will openly declare for you, and glory in your service. Nothing less than this is owing to you, in atonement, for my past cowardice, perhaps even for the scandals I have given. At least, the respect I owe to your holy law demands it of me. I must then acquit myself of my debt in spite of all human considerations, in spite of the discourses and railleries of the world ; I must do it at the expense of my fortune, welfare, and even life itself. If men disapprove of my conduct, it imports little, provided it be acceptable to you. If the world condemns me, it also condemned you; *the disciple is not above his master.* Matth. x. 24.— Accept my repentance, receive my purposes of amendment, strengthen my resolution. I fly from the world to cast myself into your arms ; If I have every thing to fear from my own weakness, I yet hope for all from your goodness

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SIXTH LESSON.

ON SCANDAL.

Whosoever shall scandalize one of these little ones, who believe in me, it were better for him, that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.— Matth. xviii. 6

WHATEVER notion we form of Scandal we never shall sufficiently comprehend the horror of it. It is a detestable vice, which at once attacks the honour of God; destroys the works of Jesus Christ; ignominiously degrades the Church, and brings on the ruin of christian

souls. You pronounced that dreadful oracle, O adorable Saviour, which is accomplished every day: *Wo to the world, because of scandals.* Matth. xviii. 7.—If we ask the reason; why; it is, 1st, because scandal rises up against God, and impiously attacks his honour. All sins, it is true, have this in common with scandal, that they are insults to the divine Being; but what is peculiar to this vice above all other sins is, that it rises in a more open and determinate manner against God. Other sins lie, as it were, buried in the horror of the darkness, in which they are conceived; scandal openly takes off the mask, and walks abroad at noon day. In other sins men seem still to keep some measure, and prescribe themselves certain bounds in their excesses; they show some kind of respect for the sovereign greatness of God; they stand in awe of his justice! they tremble, and are disquieted, and blush in the commission of their crimes; whereas scandal tramples over all laws, and seems wholly to stifle the sentiments, which reason, modesty, and religion had inspired. It arms itself with audaciousness against the Almighty himself; it invades his honour, and most sacred rights; it makes his holy name be blasphemed. A crying disorder, which the Apostle laments so bitterly: *the name of God*, says he, *through you is blasphemed among the Gentiles.* Rom. ii. 24.—Blasphemy is committed against the sanctity of God, which scandal dishonours, blasphemy against his mercy, which is abused by it, blasphemy against his Providence, which it occasions to be called in doubt. As long as the sinner still fears and conceals himself he is sensible, that he has a master over him; his fear is a kind of forced homage, which he pays to God; the blush that appears on his countenance immediately on his faults coming to the knowledge of men, is a species of honourary atonement, which he makes to his Creator in spite of himself. But if this fear and bashfulness are worn out, the sinner walks with his head aloft; he seems to rejoice in his sin, and even glory in it. Is not this adding contempt to audaciousness? My God, what

a heinous crime in man thus to outrage your honour? Is it possible, that Christians, who should mutually help each other to promote the glory of their common Father, should prove instrumental in urging one another on to insult and upbraid him?

2dly. The second reason of our Saviour's pronouncing scandal to be a curse on the world is, because it rises up against Jesus Christ himself, and as far as is dependent on it, destroys his work. Christ came down from heaven to establish the kingdom of his Father upon earth, to make his holy name be adored, to inspire a fear and love of God, to cause virtue to be respected, to decry and overturn the empire of vice; which was the object of his mission and end of all his labours. Scandal opposes this undertaking, it stops the progress of it, it overturns, in a manner, the holy edifice of Christianity, by authorizing vice and discouraging virtue. Thus, O adorable Saviour, you came down upon earth, you passed a life of sorrow amongst us, you finished your career on a cross, you spilled even the last drop of your blood, and all this with a view of accomplishing your work; and scandal, the enemy of your undertaking, thwarts your intentions, it frustrates the designs of your mercy, and as far as depends on it, annihilates the mystery of the cross, rendering the merits of your passion fruitless, and wresting from your hands and very bosom, souls redeemed by you at so dear a rate. Whence St. John does not hesitate to call scandals so many Antichrists upon earth: *Even now there are become many Antichrists.* 1 John ii. 18.—In effect, if Antichrist will be such, and merit his name from spreading scandal, disorder and desolation on all sides, are not they, who prepare the way for him by the encouragement of vice, as it were, so many Antichrists, possessed of his spirit, inspired by his breath, and thereby necessarily opposite to the spirit and intentions of Jesus Christ?

3dly. The third reason to be assigned for the woes pronounced against scandal is, because it rises up against the church, and ignominiously degrades and

debases it. In effect, what is the consequence of the glaring irregularities of those sinners, who incur this guilt? They become a subject of scandal to the children of their common mother, fulfilling in themselves these words: *Thou didst lay a scandal against thy mother's son.* Psalm lxix. 20.—And in giving scandal to the children, what sorrow do they occasion to the mother? What stabs do they give to her heart? By their scandals they vilify her authority, they decry her practices, they render her cares useless, they spread confusion and irregularity among her members: and if it is asked, why doth *the* holy *city sit solitary, that was full of people,* why are *her children led into captivity,* why do *the ways of Sion mourn,* why are *her gates broken down,* why do *her Priests sigh,* why are *her virgins in affliction,* and why *is she oppressed with bitterness?* (Jer. Lam. i. psalm.)—It may be answered, because the man of scandal has tarnished her splendor, because she has turned her joy into sadness, and, as far as depends on him, has shaken the foundation of her holy edifice to the very bottom. In a word, the most dangerous war, that hell ever raised against the church, is the corruption of morals introduced into all states by means of the scandalous man, and by the seduction of his scandals. This is the sword of sorrow, that pierces through her heart, and daily forces from her such bitter complaints. She becomes the disconsolate mother, *Rachael bewailing her children,* and she *will not be comforted, because they are not.* Matt. ii. 18.—Such then are all scandalous men, the ungrateful children of an affectionate mother, whom they never cease to afflict; or rather a brood of poisonous vipers, who are nourished in her bosom, to gnaw out her vitals.

4thly. The fourth reason, why scandal is a curse on the world, is because, to set the seal to all its other excesses, it rises against souls themselves, and works their eternal ruin. O Israel, said the Prophet, overwhelmed with sorrow, *who will give water to my head, and a fountain of tears to my eyes? And I will weep day*

and night for the slain of the daughter of my people. Jer. ix. 1.—What a horrible crime to destroy souls, to become the seducer and murderer of souls, to plunge them irrevocably into hell? To rob a man of his earthly goods, whatever they may be, is sinful; to assault his person, to plunge a dagger in his breast, and bereave him of life, are heinous attempts, the sole mention whereof strikes us with horror, and of which only monsters of inhumanity can be capable; what then must it be to take from men not earthly goods, not a frail reputation, not a perishable life, but the eternal welfare of their immortal souls? Ah! if thy brother has sinned against thee, demand satisfaction, if thou wilt, on his goods, seize his fortune, but level not thy poisoned dart against his soul: *Save his true life.* Job ii. 6.—What consternation and horror should the idea of destroying a soul create? It is properly to act the part of the devil, to become his deputy, and the emissary and instrument of hell itself. Zealous Missionaries, the Ministers of the true God and Successors of the Apostles, pass beyond seas to the extremities of the earth; they enter among barbarous and uncivilized nations ready to spend their sweat, and blood itself for their conversion; and are happy, if they have but hopes of gaining only one soul to God: and a scandalous man seduces and perverts by his scandals, and plunges millions of souls into hell. *Through thy knowledge shall the brother perish, for whom Christ died?* 1 Cor. viii. 11.—And shall it be to thy scandals, that he shall be able, and must attribute his eternal misery? Unhappy mortal, dost thou fear having too little subject of regret at the hour of death? Dost thou apprehend, that thou wilt not meet accusers enough at the tribunal of God, nor executioners enough to torment thee in hell? Must thy brethren, thy own brethren, whom thou ruinest, rise up one day against thee, and, like so many implacable furies discharging their rage upon thee, to increase thy torments, make thee feel part of the bitterness and anguish, with which their own hearts will be filled?

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

If I have any love for you, O my God, and any zeal for your glory, ought I not to weep bitterly in seeing you so often and so grievously offended by scandal? But more particularly with what sorrow ought I to bewail the scandals, which I myself have given? The voice of your blood perhaps rises at this moment against me and my scandals; but I implore your grace, to help me to lament sincerely my guilt, and I call upon your great mercy for pardon, being absolutely determined to avoid the crime for the future, and as far as depends on me, to repair the evil effects of it.

1st Point. Let us consider, O my soul, how common scandal is in the world, that we may be on our guard against the seduction of it.

What various scandals, O my God, are there in the world, and how many ways is scandal given? A deluge of iniquities overwhelms the whole earth, and we may say that men only live together mutually to destroy, and work each others eternal ruin by their scandals. They give it at all times, in all places, in all states, and in all kinds of ways.

They give it by those licentious discourses, which openly convey the poison of corruption, and by those double meanings and equivocal expressions, which seem only to conceal the poison to convey it more subtilely, and thereby render its effect more certain. Can men be ignorant, that from the depravation of the human heart, every word bearing a double meaning is usually taken in the worst sense?

They give it by those dangerous books, wherein, according to the expression of the Prophet, *death comes up through our windows*, (Jer. ix. 21.) or eyes, and enters insensibly *into* the *house* of our soul. Its approach is not perceived, and its fatal weapon has already pierced through our heart. How many souls unfortunately perish by this means?

They give it by those indecent paintings and figures, which display all the allurements of sinful pleasure, and which, to the shame of Christianity, often make the chief ornament of Christian apartments.

They give it by those dissolute, unguarded and worldly manners, that light behaviour, those indecent fashions, those unbecoming modes of dress, which, in lieu of sheltering modesty, are often only, as it were, a last disguise of expiring purity.

They give it by circulating abroad those perverse maxims of the world, which make deadly wounds in Christian souls; wounds, which perhaps will bleed for eternity.

As to the modes of giving it, they give it on set purpose, fully perceiving that they give it, and wilfully employing the means, which they know must naturally produce it. They give it at times and on occasions, when they are especially bound by duty to prevent and decry it. They gave it to those very persons, to whom by their state they are obliged to give edification and good example.

Just God, with what eye dost thou regard such heinous crimes, nevertheless crimes very common in the world? Alas! I deplore the vice of scandal in others, I am struck with horror at it, and sigh over it, whilst I have yet so much to reproach myself with in the same kind. If I examine myself seriously before thee, my God, how guilty and responsible shall I find myself herein? If I enter into judgment with myself, how many scandals shall I see given by me during my life? How often, in discourse, have I spoken indecent and inconsiderate words?

How often have I laughed at, and turned devout persons into ridicule?

How often have I passed shameful and unbecoming jests on many practices of piety and religion?

How often, by too free and inconsiderate behaviour, have I given occasion to the offence of God? have I always demeaned myself with proper modesty and respect in the house of God? Have I always shown

a due deference to the holy laws of the church in despite of human respects?

How many souls have I unfortunately either engaged in sin, or stopped in the practice of virtue? Alas! perhaps there is some one, whose ruin I have occasioned, and whose eternal misery I must ever reproach myself with. What subject of regret, O my God, have I here before me?

2d Point. Let us consider the unhappiness of those who give scandal to others, and what a dreadful weight of vengeance they draw upon themselves. Adorable Saviour, to be sensible hereof we only need attend to the curses, which you have pronounced on scandal. *Woe to the world*, say you, *because of scandals. It must needs be, that scandals come: but nevertheless wo to that man, by whom the scandal cometh.* Matt. xviii. 7.—*It were better for him, that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.* Matt. xviii. 6.—Unhappy wretch, thou causest the ruin of thy brother; behold his blood cries to me for vengeance against thee; *that wicked man shall* indeed *die in his iniquity, but I will require his blood at thy hand:* Ezek. xxxiii. 8.—thou shalt be responsible for it, thou shalt answer soul for soul. At present is the time of forbearance, in which I allow the cockle to grow together with the *good seed in my field;* but the day will come, when *I shall send* my *Angels*, the ministers of my justice, *and they shall gather out of* my *kingdom all scandals, and them that work iniquity; and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matt.* xiii. 24. 41, 42.

My children, said you again to your beloved disciples: your hands, your feet are needful for you, your eyes are useful; but *if thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to enter into life maimed or lame*, or *with one eye, than having two hands, or two feet*, or *two eyes, to be cast into everlasting fire.* Matt. xviii. 8, 9.

O my God, what more formal and awful declarations could you make against scandal? How astonishing

then is it, that in spite thereof scandal still continues in Christianity, that the vice of scandal increases every day, that men hardly ever acknowledge themselves guilty of this crime, and seldom or never think of accusing themselves of it at the sacred tribunal of penance? But what is still more melancholy and unfortunate for me is, that I myself have so often been guilty of the sin of scandal, and of consequence if I do not repent of it, all these curses must fall on me.

O my God, I did not comprehend all the horror of this vice, but since you have now made me sensible of it, with what confusion and regret ought my heart to be filled for having so sorely offended yours? If I had known how enormous it is, ought I not carefully to have avoided all the occasions, and fled even from the very shadow of it? How could I be so daring, besides the burden of my own sins, to charge myself with the heavy load of the sins of other men!

3d Point. Let us consider how great the obligation is, and what the means are of repairing scandal. It is a grievous misfortune and crime to give scandal; it is also an indispensable obligation to repair it, after it is given; an obligation so absolute, that without such reparation the sin of scandal will never be pardoned, it will always stand on record in the books of judgment, it will always cry to heaven for vengeance against the man, who has given it; so that, if having it in his power he does not repair it, it will for ever remain a title of his condemnation and eternal separation from God.

I am sensible of my obligation in this point, but what means are there at present of repairing the scandals I have given through life? The wound is opened, how is it to be closed up? The poison is imbibed, how is the fatal effect of it to be prevented? Ah! if sorrow alone were sufficient, I would rend my heart with regret and contrition at the sight of my manifold scandals; but no, my God, you demand more of me than that; and I know, that as far as depends on me, I must not only bewail, but repair the evil effects of

my scandals. My resolution then is taken of making due atonement, and I will labour to reduce my resolution to practice by a faithful compliance with the following rules:

1st. I will condemn myself to a regular and edifying life, capable of effacing the fatal impressions, which my irregular and unchristian conduct hitherto may have made in others.

2dly. I will endeavour to induce others to good and the practice of piety, by employing all the means for that purpose, which my state of life will afford me. If I have diverted souls from the divine service, ought I not to use all possible efforts to draw them back to it?

3dly. I will frequently pray in the most fervent manner for the salvation of those, to whom I may have given scandal; I will beg for them all the graces, which I wish to obtain for myself.

4thly. When occasions offer, I will not fear openly to condemn my past conduct, and make an honourable atonement for it in the presence of others. Whatever it may cost me, the desire I now have of saving my soul, shall make me disregard every sacrifice to be made in the accomplishment of my duty. If I have had the misfortune of plunging any soul into hell, I have myself deserved the same punishment. Ought not this consideration to prevent my indulging all personal compassion and apprehensions for myself? Ought not the dreadful judgments, which God has pronounced on scandal, to banish every other fear from my heart?

THE COLLOQUY.

O my God, what a horrible crime is scandal, and how odious in your sight? Nevertheless it is the crime, of which I have often been guilty, By what means shall I satisfy for it, and make the atonement, which the insults I have offered to your honour, demand? Ah! Lord, have pity on my soul; it is afflicted, and

disturbed at its sin; but as it is your grace, that inspires these sentiments, I hope once more for pardon, and being convinced of the necessity of a reform, I promise a more exemplary life for the future. Aid me with your grace to *bring forth fruit worthy of penance.* Matt. iii. 8.

SEVENTH LESSON.

ON TEPIDITY.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot: But because thou art luke warm, and neither cold or hot: I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth. Rev. iii. 15, 16.

TEPIDITY, says St. Thomas, is an habitual laziness in the service of God; it is a heaviness of the soul in attending to the things of God; a remissness in the practices of piety; and, as it were, a kind of sleep, which lulls the soul into a kind of relaxation and almost utter inactivity.

However, not to occasion groundless fears and uneasiness in the minds of Christians, it must be observed, when we speak of tepidity, that we do not understand a passing disposition of negligence for a short space of time, but an habitual and permanent one whereby the soul perseveres in such negligence.

Neither are we to be understood of a state of dryness, which may be often experienced by Christians without a fault. This dryness is a state of trial, into which God often casts souls for their sanctification; whereas tepidity is a state of unfaithfulness, into which souls fall through their own fault.

Finally, by tepidity we do not understand the state of sin; tepidity may lead to it, and it often effectually does so; but of itself it is not the state of sin, at least, not of grievous and deadly sin.

Nothing is of so high importance, as to know by what marks we are to discover whether we have or

not the misfortune of living in a state of tepidity. I shall set down the principal marks, in which others less interesting are comprised.

The first marks of being in a state of tepidity is, only to have a faint desire of our spiritual advancement, and a slight sorrow for our trespasses and neglects. This shows, that the feelings of fervour are greatly weakened in us, and as long as we languish in such a state, it is certain, that so far from making progress in the divine service, we shall always appear most imperfect in the sight of God. When our desire of obtaining a thing is weak, the efforts which we use to acquire it, are feeble: and when our efforts are feeble, how shall we ever arrive at the possession of what is not to be obtained but by violence and force?

The second mark is a great negligence in overcoming ourselves, and subduing our natural inclinations; an unwillingness to engage in that abosolutely necessary warfare against our senses, against the perverse dispositions of our heart, and other difficulties occurring in the practice of an interior life. This is no evident mark, that the heart is already vanquished before the combat; how can he conquer, who is afraid of fighting; and without fighting, what hopes can there be of victory. The only conflict, that we generally are willing to engage in, unfortunately is against grace, which we continually resist, not against our vices and defects, which gain ground every day.

The third mark is only to form a weak and unsteady resolution of practising virtue. A soul, which stops short almost as soon as it had entered on its course, we may naturally believe, has never had a determinate resolution to advance. The fire, which dies away in a short time, never was thoroughly kindled. Man, it is true, is naturally inconstant; but when he forsakes his purposes so easily, and so soon, what can we judge of him, but that his interior weakness has degenerated into a fatal habit?

The fourth mark of tepidity is often to look back, like persons spent with the fatigue of their journey,

frequently to cast back our eyes on the road we have passed, and to look with horror on what still remains. The traveller, who is in such a situation, is not calculated for a long journey; the weakness of his resolution, more than the difficulty of the road, retards his steps, and will hinder him from advancing far; if he takes breath so often, there is little prospect of his ever arriving at his journey's end.

The fifth mark of tepidity is to run in search of external dissipation, amusements and idle employs. This effusion of the soul on outward things shows, that it has no employ within, and, of consequence, that its principles of an interior life are languid and faint. Next to sin, perhaps nothing is so dangerous as such dissipation, which, by drawing the soul from itself, and casting it on outward objects, spends all its strength. These are the marks of tepidity, and certain tokens, by which it is made known.

Each of these marks, taken by itself, must make us fear; but if they all combine, let not the soul, in which they are found, deceive itself, as it is evidently in a state of tepidity. If it continues in this state, what has it not to fear? What serious consequences has it not to apprehend?

It is of the highest importance to discover the marks of tepidity, thereby to judge ourselves, but it is also absolutely necessary to search into the causes of it, in order to remove them, and cut off the principle of the evil in its very source.

The first cause of tepidity is a great fund of indolence, which we carry about us, an inordinate love of ourselves and our own ease, an aversion to restraint, and whatsoever contradicts our natural inclinations and humours. This fund of natural weakness and misery, always draws us down towards evil; it is constantly pleading for a relaxation from the law of self-denial, and insensibly leads to it, unless we are roused by superior motives of religion, which arm us against ourselves, and raise us above the influence of every self consideration.

The second cause of tepidity is a want of courage and resolution to abandon and give ourselves wholly up to God, and the attraction of his divine grace. We are constantly bargaining and making reservations; we fear engaging too deeply and going too far. This disposition keeps the soul in suspense between God and itself, so that it is not wholly devoted to God, nor wholly to the world; it appears to incline sometimes to one side, sometimes to the other, and thus wavering in a shameful manner, the heart is divided, and its thoughts and sentiments are ever changeable and unsteady. Ah! if we, once for all, could take the generous determination of giving ourselves thoroughly to God, what courage should we find? What liberty and peace should we enjoy? Whereas, for want of this noble determination, we trail on a languishing and miserable life, and pass our days in a kind of lethargic stupidity, that renders us incapable of every generous feeling and exertion.

The third cause is an habitual neglect of small things, and a spirit of independence and liberty, which makes us unwilling to be subject to the restraint of a thousand small observances, that God demands of those who seek to serve him. For as God, on his side, liberally affords help to draw souls to himself, and support them in his service; so he exacts of them a great fidelity in the observance of every point of his law, and in things apparently even of small importance. Nothing is little in the eyes of God, especially for souls, which are prevented with extraordinary graces, and over which his providence has formed particular designs.

The fourth cause of tepidity is deliberate faults, and a wilful unfaithfulness to grace. Nothing weakens and stops a soul so much in the ways of God, as such resistance to his holy will. If faults escape us from weakness, levity or inadvertency, they are the effect of human imperfection, and we must remember, that we are men: but to fall frequently, on set purpose, with full knowledge, in spite of the dictates of our

conscience, and present lights of the Holy Ghost, is wounding the very heart of God, frustrating his precious designs, and inuring the soul to coldness and indifference, which necessarily occasions a reciprocal coolness in God towards the soul. And what more is requisite to fix a soul in the state of tepidity?

Many other are the causes of tepidity. How many enemies, both from without and within, constantly oppose the spirit of true fervour and devotion? From time to time we form desires and projects of becoming fervent, but like men overwhelmed with sleep, who open and close their eyes to the light almost in the same moment, we return incessantly again into our former state of remissness.

When shall we rise from the grave of tepidity, that state, which is so disagreeable to God, so fatal to our own souls, so contrary to grace, so capable of driving us still farther from God, and exposing us to eternal misery?

MEDITATION.

ON THE FATAL CONSEQUENCES AND EFFECTS OF TEPIDITY.

To form a just idea of tepidity, and to become more sensible of its unhappy effects, I must represent it to myself under the figure of a dangerous sickness. For what sickness is to the body, tepidity is to the soul. Now what happens in sickness, and what is usually its unhappy progress in the different stages through which a sick man passes? Let us be struck with horror in beholding the fatal progress of bodily disorders, when we see ourselves represented under so doleful a figure.

In sickness there is a state of weakness, a state of disgust, a state of drowsiness and lethargy, a state of languor and fainting, which at length leads us to a state of death. A melancholy, but too natural a representation of what tepedity works in the soul.

Make me, O my God, fully comprehend the great-

ness of the danger and fatal consequences of this situation. Such knowledge, animated and enlivened by your grace, will suffice to inspire me for ever with a holy fear and salutary dread of it.

1st. In sickness there is a state of weakness. Disorders of the body commence from thence, and it is also from thence, that illness of the soul begins. We find ourselves weak and languid: we hardly can bear any thing; we resist and fight against the faintness for a time, but at length it overpowers us; our weakness increases, and we become, in a manner, incapable of every thing; which is a true description of tepidity. In the happy days of fervour nothing was painful, nothing irksome; all things seemed sweet and light in the service of God; even the greatest difficulties were easily surmounted. Those happy days are now past; a melancholy gloom succeeds the serenity, which overspread the soul; fervour relents; zeal is weakened, and little by little tepidity grows in its stead. The evil began by some small negligence in our Christian duties, which insensibly gained upon us; a remissness in the practices of piety increased its influence; by voluntary infidelities it is brought to a dangerous height. Our heart is now oppressed and cast down; and as formerly the greatest things and greatest sacrifices only served to rouse our courage, so at present the smallest and most trifling obstacles frighten and discourage us.

Is not this my situation? Can I dissemble it in thy sight, O my God? What weakness and negligence do I discover in thy service? What cowardice, when I should conquer myself, and make different sacrifices to thee? At certain times what a total weariness and dispiritedness reign in my soul? My strength is all exhausted. The truth is, I am wanting to grace, which in happier days supported and encouraged me, whilst I was faithful to it. Ah! that I could say with that holy man Job, *Who will grant me, that I might be according to the months past, according to the days, in which God kept me? When his lamp shined over my*

head, and I walked by his light in darkness. Job xxix. 2, 3.

2dly. In sickness there is a state of loathing and disgust. The soul in like manner falls into a state, wherein it begins to loathe the exercise of piety, grow insensible of the unction of divine grace, and withdraw itself from God. Heretofore it was strongly attached to the divine service, it found an inexpressible joy and comfort in things appertaining to God ; but little by little it grew disgusted, tired, and at length conceived an utter dislike to the duties of true virtue. A striking example hereof was seen in the Israelites in the desert. Manna was to them a heavenly food, which contained every delicious taste that could gratify their palates, and as long as they remained faithful to their God, and walked in the ways of his commandments, it continued to be such to them. But no sooner did they relent in their fervour, and forget their duty to God, than the manna lost its delicious taste and relish : *Our soul*, said they, *loatheth this very light food.* Numb. xxi. 5.—A melancholy picture of a tepid soul. Every thing becomes loathsome, disgusting and burdensome to it. If it goes to pray, the time is long and tedious ; it waits with impatience for the close of the lingering hour. If a penitential exercise is to be performed, it experiences the greatest difficulty in submitting to it and invents a thousand excuses to plead exemption. It approaches less frequently to the holy sacraments than heretofore ; it goes sometimes, because it sees that go it must ; but it is without unction, with unwillingness and regret, and only after deferring and keeping from them, as long as it can. *Our soul loatheth this very light food.*

But is not this my case ? Is it not what I have experienced for a long while ? Nothing pleases me in the service of God, every exercise of devotion is tasteless and insipid ; I find no longer the relish I formerly had for piety ; zeal for my perfection, and the practice of good works is wholly abated. In what a deplorable situation is the sick man when he is reduced to a

fatal loathing for all food? In effect, what name does the world give his disorder? It calls it a mortal disgust, which portends nothing but a speedy approach of death. And what can an utter disrelish of the things of God announce to the soul, if it continues in it? Permit it not, O my God; make us experience the sweets of your service, and allow us only to find bitterness and disgust in all other things.

3dly. In illness there is a state of drowsiness, and a species of lethargy. Such is the common course of disorders. When sick men have suffered some time the inconveniences of weakness and disgust they fall into a state of sleepiness and insensibility. So also it fares with the soul. After living a considerable while in negligence and tepidity, we are hardly any longer affected with our own situation, but become insensible to it. Heretofore we experienced salutary remorses, we were attentive to the interior calls of divine grace, we listened to wholesome advices, and were strongly affected at the sight of good examples. At present we are become proof against all these holy impressions; no, nothing touches, nothing strikes us. The evil is so great, that it is no longer felt, nor the danger of it perceived.

When the soul is plunged into this state of drowsiness and spiritual lethargy, it is not to be expressed into what numberless faults and infidelities it falls. The whole day, nay, the whole life of man in this situation passes in a continual series of omissions, negligences, and resistances to grace, though he is hardly sensible of them, and much less thinks of reproaching himself with them. If he retires to his oratory to examine his conscience, and enter into the discussion of his faults, he discovers nothing. But ah! my God, if the light of thy grace represented him to himself, such as he is, of how many faults would he see himself guilty? How many idle, foreign, and dangerous thoughts possess his mind? How many imperfect feelings, aversions, repugnances, and carnal affections beset his heart? How much vanity, curiosity, and

lightness is indulged by him? How much dissipation, sensuality, and criminal abuse of all his senses? How imperfect are the motives of his actions? How many artifices of self-love discover themselves throughout his whole conduct? Alas! to what fatal lengths is his disorder come?

But whilst I am contemplating this frightful picture, can I fail of discovering my own likeness in it, and seeing from this representation what I am? Is not this the stage of illness, to which my soul is reduced? I commit faults, and I am not affected at them; I abuse graces, and I feel no remorse; I cannot help knowing the danger of my situation, and I am not alarmed at it. Nothing rouses me from my lethargy; I remain still immersed in my sleepiness. I have often been admonished of my situation, and yet I continue in it. What will be the fatal consequences, if I have not the happiness of preventing them?

4thly. By gradually increasing, the disorder at length comes to its height. After the foregoing states of weakness, loathing, and drowsiness, the sick man falls at last into a state of languor and fainting, which is the immediate forerunner of death. This is the last symptom in bodily illness, and the last period of tepidity is a spiritual faintness and decay of the soul. It falls away, wastes and perceives itself sinking. Because after the neglect of so many helps and graces, after so many accumulated resistances, God seems to withdraw himself, and in effect he withdraws his more precious and privileged graces without which the soul hardly subsists. On one hand, the tepid soul is disgusted with God; and on the other, God loaths the tepid soul; their mutual affections to each other are nearly extinguished; nothing but coolness and indifference for God reigns in the soul, and in return God has nothing but coolness and indifference for the tepid soul.

O, my soul, in punishment of thy undutifulness to thy God, he then hides himself from thee in a dark cloud; but from the midst of that melancholy dark-

ness I hear the woful oracle coming forth; the curse is pronounced: *I would thou wert cold or hot; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.* Rev. iii. 15, 16.—Awful words upon which we cannot meditate without trembling; but as they are uttered by the Holy Ghost, can we either dissemble them, to refuse entering into the full meaning of them? Thou thyself, O my God, speakest them to the tepid soul; and what sayest thou to it? It were better for thee that thou hadst fallen into a state of coldness; but because thou languishest in a state of tepidity, and by thy lukewarmness thou provokest a nauseousness in my stomach, *I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.* A God then bewails and laments the deplorable state of a tepid soul; he sends forth his melancholy sighs over it. In his eyes a state of sin and death would, in some manner, be preferable to this state of tepidity; because a state of sin would strike and alarm the sinner; seeing himself stand on the brink of the woful abyss, the grave and hell opened under his feet, he would start at the sight of those dreadful objects, and flying back with horror would enter again into the road of salvation. He would set before his eyes, for his imitation, the example of those many holy penitents, who have done penance for their sins; the sighs of a David and tears of a Madalen would rouse him to unfeigned compunction. Whereas in a state of tepidity, the Christian not discovering any gross sin or remarkable irregularity in himself, he confidently rests in peace; his presumption hinders him from thinking repentance necessary, and his strength and vigour continually wasting away, he runs the risk of dying in that state. Perhaps even through too great security, from a want of keeping a guard over himself and fencing his heart against temptation, he will fall into some mortal sin, and make a deplorable false step in the ways of eternity. For still continuing in this state to frequent the sacraments, and partake of the tremendous mysteries of the Altar, is it not

to be feared, lest in such times of darkness, particularly under certain temptations, and in certain matters, where the difference of mortal and venial sin is hardly perceptible, he should form a wrong judgment, and soothe his conscience into a deceitful calm, whilst the criminal disposition is nourished in his heart? For, in reality, this is the dreadful danger, to which a soul in the state of tepidity lies exposed.

Ah! Lord, when shall we enter into ourselves, and open our eyes to our real interest? Shall we always live in a state, in which we shall fear to die?

Conclude, from the foregoing considerations, 1st. Often to call to mind the graces you have received from God, and the holy resolutions you heretofore made in consequence thereof, and to repent of your sloth and tepidity in not complying with those resolutions.

2dly. When you meet with difficulties and contradictions, to offer them to God in expiation of your past negligences, being but a small atonement for so great infidelity.

3dly. To reflect on the comfort you will receive at the hour of death, if you serve God with exactness and fervour: perhaps your time for this world is short; strive at least to secure a happy eternity.

4thly. To encourage yourself by the example of so many pious Christians, who, perhaps with fewer graces than you receive, serve God and practise virtue with greater fervour and generosity.

5thly. To reassume the exercises of piety and devotion, which through tepidity you have abandoned, and to acquit yourself of them with an inviolable fidelity for the future.

THE COLLOQUY.

Never did I heretofore understand these truths, O my God; never did these serious reflections present themselves so clearly to my mind. You enlighten me this day, and enlightening me you strike me with terror.

I resolve then to enter into myself, to sound the dispositions of my heart, and if necessary, even to take a general review of my conscience from the time I fell into this state of tepidity, in order both to revive the feelings of fervour in my soul, and to repair whatever may have been defective in my confessions and in the use of the sacraments during that time of darkness. Assist me, O my God, and rouse me from my natural indolence. Take me by the hand, and lead me into this new path, which you point out to me, and in which I am determined to follow you to the end. My days, however well employed, will be short to bewail my undutifulness to you, to heal the wounds which tepidity has made in my soul, and to repair the losses I suffered during the time of my illusion. You, O my God, wept over my soul, whilst it was forgetful of you and itself; be tender of it now, when, from a sense of its misery, it seeks to return to you. You see it weakness and infirmity: O great and bountiful God, restore its strength and reinstate it in its first fervour. Make true the words, which you spake by your Prophet: *it was weakened, but thou hast made it perfect.* Psalm lxvii. 10.—It is the favour I desire and ask of you, and what I hope from your goodness.

EIGHTH LESSON.

ON OUR DAILY FAULTS, AND THE DAILY SACRIFICES WHICH WE SHOULD MAKE TO GOD.

A just man shall fall seven times, and shall rise again.—Prov. xxiv. 16.

Our daily faults, so far from diminishing our trust and confidence in God, ought to serve, on the contrary, to increase our watchfulnes and fervour.

Devout persons are not impeccable; they are liable to fall into faults; the *just man* himself *shall fall seven times.* Prov. xxiv. 16.—Their faults are not indeed

grievous, or they would cease to be just. They are not even thoroughly wilful and deliberate, but often sins of frailty, inadvertency, and human weakness. Nevertheless, devout persons are also sometimes subject to faults, that are committed with greater knowledge and deliberation, and it is of these, that I intend to speak at present.

However just you be, you may sometimes chance to be disquieted at things that happen to you; sometimes you will yield to certain warmth and impatience; sometimes you will gratify motions of vanity, lightness, curiosity; sometimes you will give into dissipation, distraction of heart, idle and unprofitable reflections; sometimes you will jest and pointedly call at your neighbour; in a word, you will frequently be guilty of some unfaithfulness and resistance to the calls of grace.

For these and such other faults you must, it is true, lament and be sorrowful; but the sight of them must not cast you down and deject you, as this would be adding evil to evil, and widening the wound of your soul, instead of healing it. Your duty on such occasions is to humble yourself before God, to acknowledge your weakness and infirmity, to bewail and deplore your faults, and thus make use of the faults themselves to rivet yourself in a deeper sense of your own baseness and nothingness. Is it surprising that so great a fund of misery should engender new miseries? If your faults are not greater, it is a pure effect of the mercy of God, and of the assistance of his grace.

Nevertheless what usually happens to devout persons is, that they are disheartened and cast down at the sight of their faults; which naturally produces negligence, diminishes their trust in God, and perhaps even creates a thorough disgust of piety. Believing themselves to be in a bad state, they are persuaded, that they shall never correct their faults, never be steady in the practice of virtue, never arrive at the perfection, to which they aspire, with a thousand such

other groundless apprehensions, which cast the soul into weakness and pusillanimity, so that they hardly dare present themselves before God, or only appear in his presence filled with a false shame and diffidence, fearing and trembling, lest he should withdraw himself from them, on account of their infidelity. Thus by disquieting themselves for one fault, which is often small, they either actually fall into, or expose themselves to the danger of committing many others much greater. Their time is lost in a thousand idle reflections and considerations on themselves and on their faults; they examine, whether their transgression was wilful, whether they gave full consent to the temptation; notwithstanding that, the more they reflect and examine, the farther they are from discovering the truth. One trouble creates another; one imperfection engenders a still greater; peevishness and impatience take possession of a soul that is dispirited and cast down, and drive it into various perplexities and internal agitations, which render it incapable of every thing.

But in what light is all this regarded by God? Though humility and compunction may sometimes occasion uneasiness in our souls, yet the more usual source of it is the deceit of the devil availing himself of a secret pride, that is lurking in us, and which is easily offended at seeing itself so imperfect. Such trouble does not so much deserve the name of a healing medicine, as of a new poisonous application made to the sore; and the person himself who gives into it, is to be compared to a wounded man, who every instant, opening and looking at his wounds, frets and inflames them, or to that other, who having fallen into the dirt, instead of raising himself up, stops to consider in what manner he fell, and what gave occasion to his misfortune. Rise up and proceed on in thy journey, and be careful, lest the trouble and agitation of thy mind should be the occasion to thee of a new fall still more dangerous than the former. The same I say to a soul, that has fallen into a fault: rise up, humble thyself, and enter again without delay on thy road.

it being the only remedy, that can be applied to thy evil. In this matter we shall be reconciled to God, it being more easy to return to him by an humble and amorous compunction, than by anxiety and trouble, which usually are only the effect of human weakness, or by that diffidence and discouragement, which are more culpable than the fault itself for which we are afflicted. In all such dispositions there is often far more self-love, than the love of God.

I say still farther. An humble and amorous return to God after the trespass, often honours God more than the fault offended him; because in the fault frequently there is surprise, weakness, and inadvertency; whereas, in a sincere and humble repentance, the will is unfeignedly devoted to God, and the resolution of amendment is still full and entire.

Be careful therefore to follow invariably this rule, says a great Saint; whensoever thou fallest into a fault, though even it is considerable, be not overwhelmed with trouble and anxiety; lose not thy time in making fruitless and scrupulous examinations about it; but, acknowledging thy transgressions with sincerity and humility, turn again affectionately to God, like a child to its parents, and bewailing thy fault, say to him: My God and sovereign Lord, I have been guilty of what a weak and sinful soul like mine was capable of; but what couldst thou expect from me but these and such other like faults? I should have transgressed more grievously, if thy goodness had not supported me, and forborne abandoning me, as I deserved. I give thee thanks for the faults from which thou hast preserved me, and I ask pardon for those of which I have been guilty. Have still compassion on me, and grant me new helps, that I may no more offend thee, and that nothing in the world may separate me from thee, whom I wish to serve and love with greater fidelity for the future.

After this spend not thy time in indulging trouble and anxiety; fear not, lest God should reject thee; but entering again on thy road, proceed on with peace

and confidence, as if thou hadst not strayed from it. Though thou shouldst fall a thousand times (which God forbid,) return a thousand times to God, and cast thyself into his arms, with the same confidential love, as well after the last fault, as the first, promising never more to swerve from him.

Thus we shall honour the goodness of God, by conceiving a great idea of it; we shall make his grace triumphant, in rendering it superior to all our weaknesses; we shall turn our poison into a remedy, by drawing a cure from our sin, and perhaps even be raised higher in grace after our fall, than we were in the moment we fell.

O goodness and patience of God, how wondérful and unspeakable are ye, in thus making use of our imperfections themselves to raise up in us more resplendent monuments of your mercy?

Nevertheless it is not to be imagined, that we are not to use all possible care and watchfulness to avoid faults, without which we should neither fear nor love God. It would be a strange illusion, nay, a most singular blindness, to fancy, because an application can be made to a sore, that therefore we may in prudence wound ourselves, or wilfully throw ourselves in the way of infection, because a remedy can be procured for the disorder.

Hence it is easily seen in what manner, through the grace of God, we may draw advantage even from our faults themselves, and how our daily faults, so far from diminishing our trust and confidence in God, ought, on the contrary, to increase our watchfulness and fervour.

Many reasons concur, to show us the necessity hereof. We are bound to it through gratitude to God, who deigns by an unspeakable effect of his mercy to pardon and readmit us to his friendship. We are bound to it by the spirit of penitence, in order to repair, as far as lies in us, the fault committed, and atone for the evil we have done. We are bound to it from a motive of fidelity, because without such dispositions we shall be

exposed to fall soon into some new fault more woful and deplorable than the first. We are bound to it in order to promote our advancement in Christian virtue, and compensate our past loss of time. We are bound to it to be better enabled to render due glory to God, whom we have had the misfortune of offending.

Go then, penitent soul, and proceed on in thy course. All is already repaired in the sight of God. The building of thy perfection shall rise higher from the foundation of its own ruins, and the work will cement more closely by the precautions thou shalt take. Wouldst thou have been so much on thy guard, if by the fault, which thou hast committed and bewailed, thou hast not learned by thy own weakness, and nothingness, and felt the necessity of placing thy whole strength and confidence in God alone? May we not say, in proportion of thy fault, what the church sings in its service at Easter of the sin of our first parents: *O happy fault.* Miserable indeed, and unhappy in itself, and unhappy on account of the punishment it entails upon thee; but in its sense also happy and beneficial, considering the graces that are bestowed, and the fruits of repentance thou producest in consequence of it. After all the fault is committed, and being committed, if a remedy can be found for it, it is not in diffidence and trouble, much less in despair, but only in sorrow and compunction. God himself even cannot demand, and man is incapable of making other satisfaction, than what is made by true penitence; every other method, so far from repairing the evil, only serves to increase it, by taking away a hope of pardon, and rendering repentance ineffectual.

Adopt then the following rules. 1st, Be fearful of committing faults; but, if committed, detest them, humble thyself for them, have recourse to God, and be more dutiful to him for the future.

2dly. Be persuaded, that all thy faults will turn to profit, if they rid thee of that secret pride, that baneful leaven of self-love, and fatal trust in thyself, to which thou art subject.

3dly. In regard to thy faults, neither excuse them, as it would be illusion; nor be afflicted at them, as it would mark thy impatience; nor betray thy weakness by diffidence and discouragement, but humbly have recourse to God for pardon and amendment, as to thy only refuge.

4thly. Believe that, in the sight of God, an imperfection, for which thou sincerely humblest thyself, is a less evil, than a pretended virtue, which thou shouldst relish with complacency and satisfaction; which would only serve to nourish thy vanity, pride, and self-love.

MEDITATION.

ON THE DAILY SACRIFICES TO BE MADE TO GOD.

THERE is not a day in life, wherein some sacrifice ought not to be made to God, and every day usually presents us with occasions of many. If we knew how to avail ourselves of them, what a fund of merits should we acquire? Nothing more than these daily sacrifices, would be requisite to make us saints, and even great saints.

I come to present them to thee, O my God, and to petition thy grace to make the offering of them in a manner worthy of thyself. Teach me to enrich myself from this abundant source of merits. Hitherto I have neglected to benefit myself of it, because I knew not its value.

1st Point. Let us consider how many occasions of merit are presented us by God in the course of the day. Every moment we have treasures offered us, and we make no account of them, and by our negligence we expose ourselves to be entirely deprived of them.

Troubles and crosses meet us throughout the whole course of life. Amongst these many are so distressing and afflicting, that they hardly ever are absent from our mind, but spread a melancholy gloom and bitterness over our soul, which constantly make us pass our days in lamentation and mourning. My God, if we knew how to avail ourselves of them, and offer them

to you in proportion as they befall us, what pleasing sacrifices should we present to you every day?

We have daily duties to comply with in whatever station of life we are, and amongst these duties many are tedious, painful and burdensome to us. There are decencies, which we must observe; attentions, we must pay; visits to be received and returned; a thousand employs, a thousand cares, a thousand subjections, and of consequence as many troubles and restraints, which we must undergo. We must thwart our inclinations, contradict our will, often do what we would not, and omit doing what we would; all which create new troubles, mortification, tediousness and disgust. O my God, if we submitted to these contradictions, in conformity to your decrees, and in a spirit of penitence, how much merit should we reap for eternity each moment of our lives?

In society and the commerce of life we are obliged to live and treat with different persons and different characters: some are reasonable, and seem made for the comfort of society; others appear only to be formed to exercise our patience, and render life burdensome. Notwithstanding, we must live with all, and keep peace and charity with all. Now, how much will this cost us, and to this end how many victories must we daily gain over ourselves? What violence must we offer to our natural dispositions? How often must we forsake our own sentiments? How many things must we dissemble? How many rudenesses and incivilities must we bear with? In a word, how many sacrifices must be made, which will be so much more difficult and burdensome, as they are sacrifices occurring every day, yea, almost every moment of our life?

You permit, O my God, that we should exercise one another, that we should mutually prove each other's cross, and make life burdensome and painful to each other. In the views of your Providence, all this ought to serve for our sanctification; but by the bad use, or rather by the abuse we make of it, it only con-

tributes to our condemnation and future misery. Men are daily tormenting one another, and increasing one anothers' unhappiness and crimes, by the very things which you ordained should make us all both holy and happy.

But without going forth from ourselves, and seeking occasions of sacrifice from without, how many shall we find within ourselves? How many thorns grow up in our own ground? How often are we obliged to take up arms against ourselves, to repress our vanity, our natural liveliness, our impatience; to subject ourselves to silence, when we wish to speak; or to speak, when we wish to be silent; to contradict our fancies, to curb the sallies of our humour, to overcome our difficulties and repugnances; to abandon our own judgment; in a word, to captivate and restrain ourselves in a thousand things? If we are subject to habitual ailments and infirmities, why do we publish them to the world, and complain of them every instant to those around us, so as to render ourselves insupportable both to ourselves and them? Would it not be preferable, O my God, to bear them in silent patience, making our cross known to none by but thyself? Thou wouldst have compassion on us, and soothe our evil; whereas in others we only find indifference and insensibility, which aggravates our suffering, and adds to the weight of our distress. How often have we secret troubles and personal uneasinesses, afflictions of mind and heart, which cannot be communicated, but must be smothered within our own breasts? If we knew how to converse with thee in private, O my God, on the subject of our troubles; to rely on thee, and offer our afflictions to thee; what helps and comfort should we receive, what merits should we store up for eternity?

In some occasions we are oppressed with fear and diffidence, or an universal disgust and tediousness reign throughout our soul. Though we know not the cause of our disquiet, we are sovereignly uneasy; though we cannot tell what disturbs and gives us

trouble, we find ourselves troubled and disturbed. These are moments, O my God, in which we ought to have recourse to thee; and, by offering up our sufferings to thee, to seek a remedy for them there, where alone it can be found. Can there be occasions wanting of making daily sacrifices to thee; and what would these sacrifices merit for us in heaven?

Yes, every day I have treasures offered me, and I neglect them. There are daily so many talents, which I might improve to an hundred fold; so many steps, which I might make towards heaven, so many precious stones, with which I might enrich my crown, but I am blind and unfortunate enough to squander away my treasures, to bury my talents, to lose the favourable occasions of merit, to cast away my diamonds and precious pearls; and thus, after having had thousands of opportunities of heaping up immense riches, I shall find myself at the last day with my hands empty, or else only loaded with a weight of wrath, which I have treasured up to myself.

O my soul, make then this day the generous and steadfast resolution of being as diligent in availing thyself of occasions of sacrificing thy will, as thou hast hitherto been negligent; arm thyself with courage against thy weakness, vanquish thy repugnances, subdue thy self-love; imitate those generous persons, who eagerly seize every opportunity of advancing in the ways of God, and henceforward be thou more faithful to him. A thousand occasions of merit have been lost by thee; a thousand new occasions will present themselves of repairing the loss; the whole consists in profiting of these occasions, and in seconding the grace of God, which is given thee for that purpose.

2d Point. Let us consider, in the second place, in what manner these sacrifices are to be made, and through what motives they ought to be offered to God to become worthy of his acceptance. Let the following considerations have their influence due with us. We are every day guilty of faults, and commit sins; it is a favour God does us, that we have every day

something to offer to him in expiation of our sins. Every day he grants us new graces and favours; what a happiness to be able every day to present him with something in return? We are every day attentive to our own convenience; we study our ease; we seek our pure natural contentment and satisfaction; is it not just to offer violence to ourselves every day, and practice some mortification, in order to obtain lasting contentment in heaven? If we do not run in search of the occasions, let us at least avail ourselves of those, which fall in our way. Every day we are bound to advance in the paths of salvation; means are offered us thereunto; shall we be unfaithful enough to reject and abuse them? As Christians we are obliged every day to renounce ourselves, to vanquish and die to ourselves.

Above all, we are under an indispensable obligation of loving God every day, and of giving him some mark of our love. Are we not happy, that he deigns to accept such feeble tokens of it? At least how shameful and sinful will our ingratitude be, if we refuse him these small marks of our affection?—What numberless and powerful motives are here presented to us? Can we be insensible of them?

O my soul, what a plentiful harvest of merits hast thou got? Be careful to reap it diligently. Form to thyself an entirely new plan of conduct; take the sincere resolution of availing thyself of all the occasions thou mayest have of offering sacrifices to God; thy duties, thy employs, thy conversation, thy affairs will afford thee many every day, and become to thee an abundant source of supernatural virtue and merit. Hold, as undoubted maxims, that it is better to deny thyself a thousand times, than once mortify thy neighbour; that a small sacrifice made at a proper time may prevent innumerable faults and uneasiness; that if we would subtilize on every thing, and take all things in the utmost rigour, we should be engaged every day in quarrels; that do what we will, we must still, either by free will or compulsion, often deny ourselves; that if

the sacrifice is not made to grace, it must be made to necessity; if not offered to God, that it must be to the world, and at the same time we be deprived of our merit, whilst we are suffering all the pain and hardship of it.

No day passes, in which we have not innumerable occasions of denying ourselves. At our meals we may often make a sacrifice of some small thing to God, without being perceived; it is his special due, considering the great intemperances, of which we have so frequently been guilty. We may retrench some part of our rest: how often has it been prolonged beyond the limits of discretion?

What opportunities have we of overlooking many niceties and adjustments in our dress and apparel? Does not the past vanity we have indulged, particularly require it of us?

Thou wishest to gratify thy curiosity, refrain thy looks, and stop thy curious inquiries. Thou desirest to carry off the applause of a jest and witticism, give not way to thy humour.

If thou art invited to partake of a party of pleasure, find out a reasonable excuse to exempt thyself from it.

A sharp word is spoken to thee in conversation, repress the emotion of thy heart, and bridle thy tongue.

What numberless occasions wilt thou have of retrenching peevish words, of stifling thy resentments, of not seeking for opportunities of revenge, when a slight is put upon thee, when thy good deeds are repaid with ingratitude, when a just service is denied thee, when thou art reproached and insulted without reason? In all these things thou wilt have many subjects of self-denial, and as many occasions of merit.

THE COLLOQUY.

I AM sensible, O my God, that if we knew the troubles, that constantly occur in every state of life, we should daily have an opportunity of undergoing a most wholesome penance for our sins, of suffering

martyrdom, and even bearing our purgatory in this life. What I will henceforward therefore apply myself to, shall be to let slip no occasions of self-denial, to sacrifice my will and pleasure whensoever opportunities are offered me, and to endeavour to repair by my future diligence therein, the losses I have sustained by my former negligence, becoming as watchful and attentive to the practices of self-abnegation, as I have hitherto been slothful and inattentive to them.

I will make these offerings to thee from a motive of love; nothing is difficult, when we love; or if it be difficult, love sweetens the hardships of it. I will remember, that every sacrifice I make, is marked down in the book of life, and what feelings ought not this reflection to create in me, when I compare the smallness of the sacrifice to the eternity of the recompense? I will recollect, that hitherto I have done but little for thee, and that perhaps only a small portion of my life is remaining, whilst I have yet so much to do. Ought I not to endeavour to prepare myself every moment by small sacrifices for the last and great sacrifice, which I must one day offer up? I will unite all the sacrifices I can make to the sufferings and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His life was one continual martyrdom; I will labour to make mine a continual sacrifice.

NINTH LESSON.

ON THE DESIRES OF THE HEART.

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims to refrain yourselves from carnal desires, which war against the soul.—1 Pet. ii. 11.

THE heart of man is an inexhaustible fund of desires, and his desires are an inexhaustible fund of troubles and uneasiness. Man forms desires to become happy, and his desires serve only to make him miserable.

For particular things are to be considered in our desires, *viz.* their multitude, their extensiveness, their

liveliness, and their contrariety. They overwhelm us with their multitude, they bewilder us by their extensiveness, they transport and hurry us with their liveliness, they tear us in pieces by their contrariety. Blinded man, is it for this that thou wert to form so many desires? Is this the source, where thou art to seek thy happiness?

1st. The multitude of our desires overwhelm us. Every moment sees a new desire spring up in our hearts; this was preceded by a former, as it presently also, in its turn, gives way to another, which rises up after it. They are like innumerable waves, which rushing upon one another keep the heart in constant agitation; they are thorns perpetually springing up under our feet, and gnawing worms, that breed in the soul, and devour the very substance, from which they are engendered. Alas! what a multiplicity of desires do we form? Vague and uncertain desires, restless and unsettled desires, base and shameful desires, whimsical and capricious desires, wild and chimerical desires, sinful and criminal desires. Thou knowest it by thy disquieted heart, and a fatal experience has convinced thee of it more than the force of any language can. But in what have the many desires, which thou hast formed, at length ended? They employed thee for a time; they disquieted and made thee uneasy; after that they vanished, and nothing remained of them but the remembrance of thy uneasiness; or if at any time they seemed to meet with success, in lieu of giving thee solid satisfaction, through the just judgment of God did not they become the occasion of new troubles and anxieties to thee? Dreadful punishment of a heart, to which God does not suffice, and which neglects seeking its happiness in him alone!

2dly. We are perplexed and bewildered by the extensiveness of our desires. For as they are without number, so they are without bounds, and when once the heart has allowed itself the liberty of wishing, there is no end of its conceiving desires. When was the ambitious man contented with the honours he had re-

ceived, if he saw others placed before him, to which he could aspire? When did the miser say, that the treasures he had heaped up, were sufficient, whilst others were in view? When did any man, who seeks the enjoyments of life, prescribe limits to his pursuits, if he thought that they were susceptible of extension? The fulfilling of one desire breeds another more unbounded one; if we succeed in one project, we venture on a second, which is yet more daring, and never think, that we have advanced far enough, as long as there is any way to be made. But alas! what peace can a restless fluttering heart enjoy, which is always sighing for what it wants, or fancies that it wants, and continually running after a phantom of happiness, which escapes from its grasp, the moment it thinks to lay hold of it? When will the greedy heart be at rest, which nothing can satiate, and which plenty itself only makes more hungry? It is a fathomless abyss, that ingulfs and swallows up every thing: a devouring fire, which consumes all things in a moment, that are thrown into it. Is happiness thus to be obtained? Do desires open the road to it?

3dly. The liveliness of our desires hurries and transports us out of ourselves. However insensible a man naturally is, he presently ceases to be unfeeling, if he begins to form desires. From that moment he seems to change his nature; liveliness and impetuosity take place of temper and moderation, and what was coolness and ice itself becomes in an instant all heat and fire. Every expedient and every measure are made use of to fulfil his desires. Cares and labours are embraced almost beyond his strength; prayers and solicitations are carried to importunity; subjection and dependence even to baseness. Why? Because he has formed desires in his heart, and these desires must be completed. Nothing curbs, nothing stops an impetuous desire in its course; even obstacles only serve to egg it on. Like a torrent it rushes with violence against the rock that opposes it, and becomes more violent by the opposition. But if, in spite of his assid-

uous and unrelenting endeavours, this man chances to fail of accomplishing his desires, ah! to what troubles and agitations does his unfortunate heart become a prey? All the passions, to which humanity is subject, seem to gather, as it were, by consent in the midst of it to rack and torment it. Jealousy and envy gnaw it in pieces, hatred transports it, melancholy overwhelms it. Blinded and unhappy mortals are we thus by indulging our immoderate desires, and by envying the pretended happiness of others, to create ourselves more torments than our greatest enemies could wish to see inflicted upon us.

4thly. The contrariety of our desires tears us in pieces. In effect, how can such numberless desires, and formed on such different objects, stand together, and not mutually oppose and destroy each other? Does not experience and our own feeling show, that we are cast into a kind of rage or madness by the contrast of these desires? One impels, another retards; one raises, another casts down; we become like the tower of Babel, where each one is crying out, and no one understood; or as an horrible field of battle, in which armies of opposite desires are drawn out in battalia, and engage in an intestine and most cruel war. To speak perhaps more properly, the heart of man at these times is rather a woful representation of hell, and of the unfortunate damned, being reduced like those unhappy wretches to form fruitless and contradictory wishes, desiring without ceasing, to be possessed of blessings, to which it never can attain, and to be freed from evils, with which it will for ever be overwhelmed.

Such and still more deplorable is the situation of a heart given up to the implacable rage of its own desires. The Holy Ghost gives us a striking, yet truly natural picture of it. *The wicked*, says he, *are like the raging sea, which cannot rest, and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire.* Isaiah lvii. 20.—Represent to yourself an ocean exposed to the fury of tempestuous winds: you see an infinite number of waves, that rise

and succeed each other without interruption, an emblem of the multiplicity of our desires. You view the rolling surge run from shore to shore, and covering the whole extent of the sea, a figure of the extensiveness of our desires. You hear the tumultuous waters roaring with unrelenting fury, and rushing impetuously against every rock and bar that opposes them, a picture of the impetuosity of our desires. Finally, the billows roused up by contrary impulses ebb and flow, rise and fall, dash and are mutually broken one against another; behold the opposition and contrariety of our desires. *The wicked are like the raging sea;* that is, as on a raging sea the darkness of the clouds, which hang over it, the agitation of the waves, which rise up on all sides, the roaring of thunder and flashes of lightning, which dart from all parts, spread terror around, and present nothing to our view but a prospect of immediate death; so in a heart agitated with various desires, we see nothing but darkness and obscurity, confusion and trouble, fright and consternation arising from remorses of conscience, which tear it in pieces, and which, as so many flashes of lightning or claps of thunder, announce the terrors of an approaching vengeance of God.

It only belongs to thee, my God, to calm this enraged sea, and pacify this agitated heart. Renew in our behalf the wonder, which thou formerly workedst in favour of thy Apostles; *command the winds and the sea;* Matt. viii. 26.—appease the tempest, allay the rage of our earthly and worldly desires, calm and tranquility will then ensue; and establishing their empire in our hearts, those other words will also be verified; *and there came a great calm.* Matt. viii. 26.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

All our desires ought to centre in thee, O my God; thou wouldst grant us the accomplishment of them, and the accomplishment of them would make us hap-

py; whereas, when we swerve from thee, our desires turn against ourselves, and render us not only criminal, but unhappy. Enlighten me, O bountiful God, to see the lamentable distress, into which our desires cast us, and the fatal term, to which they lead.

1st Point. Our desires make us unhappy. All men wish for happiness; this desire is born with us; nature itself hath imprinted it in our hearts; we seek for happiness on all sides, and sigh incessantly after it. But, foolish mortals! we seek for it where it is not, and neglect searching where alone it is to be found. Thus abandoned to the wildness of our own fancies and desires, we make ourselves unhappy by the very things, in which we hoped to find happiness.

In effect, what more unhappy being than a heart exposed to a multiplicity of boundless, impetuous, and contradictory desires, which overwhelm with their multiplicity, perplex by their extensiveness, transport with their impetuosity, and by their contrariety rack and tear it in pieces? Can it ever enjoy a moment's rest? Does it know the name of peace? Does that heart stand in need of any other enemy, any other torturer than itself? It is an inexhaustible fund of gnawing troubles, a land accursed by God, a region of darkness and confusion, an anticipated hell. Such and still more unhappy is a heart agitated and tormented by the insatiable thirst of its own desires.

Alas! how is man to be pitied for giving himself up to the intemperance of his desires? Will he never understand, that as many profane desires, as he forms in his heart, so many enemies he forms against his own rest; that his desires will for ever be a fatal source of disquiet to him; that eager desires degenerate into passion; that passion governs by tyranny? And who was ever happy under the dominion of a tyrant?

You have ordained it thus, O my God, and the decrees of your justice are accomplished every day. Every man, who abandons his heart to his unbridled desires, finds in those very desires his torture and punishment.

O my soul, why wil. thou thus run on in the path of error, a path, as thou seest, necessarily beset with thorns, and bordered with precipices? Walk in the road of peace; keep thy unjust desires under command. Great, holy and righteous God, how often have I groaned under their tyranny? But how justly have I deserved the cruel pangs and anguish, with which they have tortured me?

2d Point. Our desires render us criminal and guilty on many different accounts. Because they draw us from the ways of Providence. A heart given up to its desires seeks to become the arbiter of its own lot, to work its own way, and in a manner withdraw itself from the decrees and ordinances of God.

Because our inordinate desires are only inspired by still more inordinate passions; by passions of pride and ambition, of avarice and sordid lucre, of jealousy and envy, of hatred and revenge, of sensuality and voluptuousness. These are the usual sources, from whence so many guilty desires, and, of consequence, so many torrents of bitterness flow.

Because our desires are only formed on dangerous objects, and hurtful to our salvation. What do we usually desire, but unlawful things? What does a heart, guided by the impetuosity of its irregular feelings and desires, run in search of but forbidden and criminal objects, with the representation whereof it is continually filled, and which constantly infect it with their poison?

Because our desires engage, as it were, our whole soul, and hinder us from applying to the business of our salvation and thoughts of eternity.

Because our desires are unjust, inordinate, unbecoming, thereby necessarily faulty and criminal, and contrary to the law, and decrees of God's providence. What a source of crimes, disorders, and iniquities, and one day what a source of punishment and misery?

My God, let me entreat you not to *give* me *up*, as you formerly did the heathen philosophers, *to the de-*

sires of my heart, to uncleanness, to shameful affections, and *to a reprobate sense.* Rom. i. 24, 26, 28.—Permit me not to be swayed by the intemperance of my desires. Settle the affections of a heart, which is only made for you, and which out of you can find nothing but vanity, bitterness and affliction. Happy yet, if the contradictions it meets with, shall draw it back to you, and fix it in your love for ever.

Let us therefore henceforward only form one desire, *viz.* an unfeigned desire of devoting ourselves to the service of God, and of sanctifying and saving our souls. May this desire employ all the powers of our mind and heart, and hallow all our affections.

Let us not run any longer after the illusions of the world, the phantoms of honour, pleasure, or perishable goods.

Long enough have they engaged and misled us, and made us both criminal and unhappy. Let us return to the ways of peace, by engaging again in the paths of holiness and justice. May this only be our ardent desire, may all our projects centre in this, all our wishes and desires be fixed on this alone.

Let us frequently repeat to ourselves those words of the Prophet: *One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord,* (Psalm xxvi. 4.) *viz.* by living in his sacred friendship and presence, *all the days of my life.* Yes, Lord, I have no other business on earth, than to serve and love thee, and to save my soul. *What have I in heaven, and, besides thee, what do I desire upon earth.* Psalm lxxii. 25.—Without thee what is the world to me, and if I am deprived of thee, what can heaven itself offer me, that is desirable and great.

I have sought for and enjoyed the illusions of a perishable world; but *I saw in all things vanity,* (Eccles. ii. 11.) and have experienced that there is nothing deserving of my ambition upon earth. Men rack and spend themselves in idle projects and desires, but what do they find at the end of their career but repentance in their hearts, shame on their foreheads, remorse in

their consciences, gall and despair in the midst of their souls?

Let others then form endless desires, and eagerly pursue their empty projects; they will soon discover the dangerous illusion and misery attending them: but *for me it is good to stick close to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God alone.* Psalm lxxii. 28.—I have had but too fatal an experience of the vanity of all other pursuits; it is time to settle my heart on the only object, for which it was created, which it never ought to have forsaken, and which it never abandoned but to its own cost.

Conclude from the foregoing reflections: 1st. To watch diligently over your desires, and the motions of your heart.

2dly. Whensoever you perceive a desire arising in you contrary to the law of God, to stifle it out of hand.

3dly. To follow the advice and example of St. Francis of Sales, whose maxim was, to desire very few things, and to be almost indifferent to the few which he desired.

4thly. Often to ask pardon of God for the criminal desires you have entertained, and to entreat him to form more holy and salutary ones in you.

5thly. To raise your heart and desires by frequent aspirations to heaven, as the only centre of your peace, and sole term of your happiness.

THE COLLOQUY.

HAPPY, O my God, a thousand times happy the man whose desires and affections centre in thee alone, and who, restraining all his wishes to the accomplishment of his duty, abandons his lot to thy sovereign will and pleasure. His heart enjoys the sweets of peace; rest and tranquillity are his portion; an unalterable calm reigns throughout all his powers. I aspire to this happy state, but it is only through thee, my God, that I can hope to obtain to it. Reject not the prayers of a heart, which laments having loved any thing else but thyself; and after having wandered

astray from thee comes to pay thee its homage, and make an open acknowledgement, that there is no happiness to be found except in thee alone. Thou only art capable of satiating the desires of my heart, and out of thee nothing is to be wished for in the world.

TENTH LESSON.

ON THE FEAR OF GOD.

Fear not them, that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him, that can destroy both soul and body in hell. —Matt. x. 28.

The great Apostle of the Gentiles, penetrated himself with fear, admonishes us all to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*. Phil. ii. 12.—That vessel of election, that prodigy of grace, and model of the apostleship, that *man caught up to the third heaven*, (2 Cor. xxi. 2.) frightened and trembling at the sight of the justice and awful judgments of God, transmits from his own breast the feelings of terror, with which it is penetrated, to fill us guilty sinners with the same, assuring us, that if we intend to be saved, it is by fear and trembling that we are to work our salvation.

We must love God, it is true; but at the same time we must fear him. We must love him, because he is infinitely good and unspeakable in his bounty; but we must also fear him, because he is just, and infinitely terrible in his justice.

God in his primitive view only intended to be loved by us; but if we do not love him, he compels us to fear him. If we love him, we enter into the plan of his mercy, which draws us to himself by the allurement and hope of rewards; but if we quit this path, his justice impresses us with terror, and announces punishments to us: in which sense St. Augustin said, that God is good and amiable in himself and only just and dreadful on our account.

There are three sorts of the fear of God. A false

and criminal fear, which only dreads the punishment of sin, and retains an actual affection to sin; it stops the hand without changing the heart. This is called a servile fear, agreeing only with vile slaves, and worthless hirelings.

A second kind of fear avoids sin, purely because it is displeasing to the infinite goodness of God; so that if there were no punishment ordained for sin, we should still detest every fault and sin, because God is injured and offended by it. This is what is called a perfect filial fear, the fear of a worthy son, who dreads nothing so much as displeasing his tender father, whom he loves.

The third kind of fear is less perfect, and holds, as it were, a middle course between the two former. It restrains us from sin, because sin is deserving of and entails punishment, and because it exposes us to the dreadful torments of hell. This fear is salutary and good in itself, in as much as it not only keeps us from actual sin, but from all affections to it, and disposes us to the love of God, as the author of justice and holiness; but it is a less perfect fear, because in its motives it regards the punishment, which threatens the sinner, more than the goodness of God, who is offended by sin.

It is of this fear, or rather of these two last sorts of fear, that we intend to speak, when we exhort to the fear of the Lord. Is any thing more requisite to make us fear God, than a consideration of his perfections, which are infinitely amiable, but at the same time infinitely to be feared and dreaded?

We must fear the inexorable justice of God, which being an irreconcilable enemy to sin, exercises its severest vengeance upon it, and pours forth all the fury of its wrath, by inflicting the most hideous and insufferable torments upon sinners. What motives have we to fear, when we contemplate a hell kindled by the wrath of God, when we see the deep abyss opening under the feet of sinners, and involving them in its eternal flames; when we hear the cries of the damned,

their sighs, their groans, their lamentations, their hideous despair? O just and avenging God, who is there among men, who shall not stand in awe of thee? *Who*, said the affrighted Prophet, *shall not fear thee, O king of nations?* Jer. x. 7.

We must fear the immaculate holiness of God, which condemns and abhors all sin, however small it be, every shadow of sin, wheresoever it appears in his sight. That holiness, which is so pure and untarnished, that *the stars*, that is, the purest souls, *are not pure in his sight*, (Job. xxiii. 5.) and angels themselves have been found defective before it. An all-penetrating holiness, which searches into hearts, discovers our most secret thoughts, weighs our actions in the scale of the sanctuary, and in our virtues finds thousands and thousands of imperfections, which it cites to its tribunal. A holiness, which being always essentially opposed to sin, always arms itself to it, and never abates in the implacable hatred which it bears against sin, and even the smallest appearance of it. What subjects of fear does the sinner find herein?

We must fear the awful power of God, which, holding our existence in his hands, keeps us, as it were, suspended every instant between two opposite eternities, and the moment we fall into sin, can strike us with its thunders, open the dreadful gulf beneath our feet, and plunge us into the never ending miseries of hell.

Yet we must fear a God, who at all times has given striking and manifest proofs of his dreadful revenge; who opened the *floodgates of heaven* (Gen. vii. 11.) to drown the human race; who rained down *fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrha;* (Gen. xix. 24.) who commanded *the earth to open her mouth* (Num. xvi. 30.) under the feet of Dathan and Abiron, and *swallow them down;* who distressed Egypt with his plagues; who put the sword into the hand of the destroying angel, and *slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh, who sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive woman, that was in the prison;* (Exod. xii. 29.) who called forth, for the

execution of his vengeance, all the instruments of his wrath, plague, war, famine, with every species of distress and calamity ; in a word, who holds the keys of death and hell in his hands, and open their gates at his pleasure. Great and powerful God, who will not dread thee, seeing that he is at each moment under the ken of thine eye, and under the power of thy arm ? *Who shall not fear, O King of nations ?* Exod.

All the saints were penetrated with this wholesome fear during their life. It was this, that led the Anchorets into the desert ; this armed the penitential Recluses with the bloody instruments of penance ; this gave courage to and animated the martyrs on their scaffolds ; this made the just sigh and tremble ; and it is the same fear, which Jesus Christ recommended so earnestly to his Apostles. My friends, said he to them, you fear the men of this earth, you fear those who hate and persecute you, and who have power to put you to death. But what can men like yourselves do against you ? *I will show you, whom you shall fear. Fear ye him, who, after he hath killed* and cast your bodies into the grave, *hath power to cast into hell.* Luc. xii. 5.—Truly he is the only one, whom you are to fear in this world, and for the next. All others can but hurt for a time ; he extends his wrath to eternity. *Yea, I say to you, fear him.* May the wholesome lesson be for ever deeply engraved in our hearts.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

COME, *children, hearken to me ; I shall teach you the fear of the Lord,* (Psalm xxxiii. 12.) said the Holy Ghost by the mouth of his Prophet. The world teaches you to give yourself up to dissipation, pleasures, amusements, and idle entertainments : I will teach you the true science of saints, *the fear of the Lord.*

Imprint deeply in my heart this wholesome fear, O my God. How many particular and personal motives have I to fear you, and tremble in your presence ?

Being covered with a multitude of sins, how shall I dare to appear before you? *Who shall stand before his face.* Psalm cxlvii. 17.

1st Point. We must fear the rigour of God's judgments. How just and terrible are they? The saints themselves dreaded them. *Men*, said our Saviour, shall be *withering away for the fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world* (Luke xxi. 26.) at the last day. What reasons therefore have I to fear, seeing that I am so guilty, and loaded with so many faults and crimes?

I must fear that fund of weakness and depravation, which reigns in me, and of which I daily experience such woful and cruel attacks; that natural propensity to evil, that fatal leaven of sin, those unhappy passions, which, being never thoroughly extinguished, may blaze into a flame at any day.

But above all, I must fear my sins; there is the great subject of my just alarms and apprehensions. I have had the misfortune to offend God. Are my sins forgiven? What assurance have I of being pardoned? Have I duly accused myself of them? Have I bewailed them with a sincere sorrow? Have I expiated them by true penance? Does God not still see them living in my heart? I know not whether I am worthy of love or hatred. If even my sins are forgiven, does not the Holy Ghost forewarn us *not* to be *without fear about sin forgiven?* Ecclesiasticus v. 5.—And though I should even be assured at present of being in the grace of God, am I certain of persevering in it? How many are there, into which I still may fall? How many ways is my salvation exposed to danger?

I must fear the temptations of the devil, who, *as a roaring lion goes about, seeking whom he may devour.* 1 Peter v. 8.—I must fear the seduction of the world, and so many deluding objects, which it sets before me to ensnare me. We walk on the brink of precipices; the world to us is like the tempestuous ocean, on which we are always exposed to the danger of shipwreck. Every moment of time puts us in danger of eternity.

I must fear for my good works, even for my virtues, if I practise any. The Holy Ghost says, *There is a way which seems straight to man, but the ends thereof lead to death.* Prov. xiv. 12.—A dreadful consideration even for just men; when the just are fearful not only for their sins, but also for their good works. *I fear all my works*, said holy Job; and ought not I, in like manner, to tremble for every action of my life? Who knows if self-love, if vanity, if worldly complaisance, if purely natural motives, do not influence all my actions, and strip them entirely of their merit?

What motives hast thou here presented to thee, O my soul, to live in a continual and sovereign fear of the Lord? *Fear God and keep his commandments* (Ecclesiastes xii. 13) is the counsel of the wise man. Yes, my soul, *fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is all man*, or, in other words, the whole duty and business of man. Entreat him to imprint in thee these sentiments of fear. Alas! we fear the world—we fear the discourses of the world—we fear unlucky events—we fear accidents, and the misfortunes of life. Let us fear the Lord, and him alone. All other things should little affect a Christian, particularly when he has had the misfortune of offending his God and his Judge. *Fear God.*

3d Point. Let us consider, that if the fear of God on one hand is dreadful, on the other it is most wholesome and beneficial. If that holy fear were deeply imprinted in my heart, ah! what fruits of salvation would it produce in me? How many sins would it preserve me from? How many virtues would it engage me to practise, and with what perfection? From how many dangerous occasions would it withdraw me? With what care should I watch over myself, over my senses, over the feelings of my heart, over the motives and principles of my actions? What circumspection in my discourse? What attention to all my steps? With what fervour should I apply myself to prayer?

How often would this fear stop me in my career,

when the course I am taking is dangerous? How often would it set a bridle on my tongue? How often would it warn me against the deceits of self-love, against the seduction of the world, and temptations of the devil?

But besides these particular advantages, let us consider in general what the saints thought of the fear of God. I hear a great saint, a recluse and penitential Bernard, crying out to his disciples: My brethren, the greatest blessing we can desire and have in this world, is the grace of God; but I aver to you in truth, as I have learned from my own experience, whether to desire the grace of God, to preserve, or increase it, there are no so effectual and secure means, as the fear of the Lord. *I have learned in truth*, says he, *that to deserve grace, to preserve and to increase it, there is nothing equally effectual, as not to be high minded, but to fear.*

Finally, the Prophet Isaiah places the fear of God in the number of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. *He shall be filled*, says he, *with the spirit of the fear of the Lord*, Isaias xi. 3.—*The fear of the Lord*, says David, *is the beginning of wisdom.* Psalm cx. 10.—How shall so many striking voices, which I hear on all sides, not deeply imprint the feelings of this salutary fear in my heart; which, as it is the beginning of wisdom, so when perfected by love, sets the crown to our virtue, as the Holy Ghost again declares? *The fear of the Lord is a crown of wisdom, filling up peace, and the fruit of salvation.* Eccles. 1. 22.

Conclude, from the foregoing resolutions: 1st. Earnestly to entreat God, to penetrate you with a holy fear of his judgments.

2dly. Often to reflect on the dreadful punishments he has inflicted on sinners. Is any thing more requisite to make you tremble for yourself?

3dly. To look upon yourself as upon the point of falling into the hands of an angry God.

4thly. To back these sentiments of lively fear with the sentiments of filial love. God is your judge; but God is your father.

THE COLLOQUY.

Ah, Lord, I will cry out to thee, in the language of the prophet, *pierce* not only my heart, but *my flesh* and bones, *with* the salutary impressions of *thy fear*. I tremble, O my God, and *am afraid of thy judgments*.

Penetrated with this fear, which I always carry about me, *I labour in my groanings, every night I wash my bed, I water my couch with my tears: tears are my bread day and night;* my senses are disturbed at the remembrance of my sins, my mind is alarmed at the sight of thy indignation and wrath. I walk sorrowful in the day, and I let the voice of my sighs be heard by night. The subject of my fear and sorrow, viz. *my iniquity and sin, is always before me: but turn thou away my face from my sins: for if thou, O Lord, shall mark my iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it?* Just and exasperated God, *enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight no man living shall be justified.* Make known then thy great mercy in pardoning my great iniquity, and set forth thy unlimited bounty in saving what thou hast power to destroy.

But I know, my God, that this fear must not be carried to excess, nor deprive me of my confidence and love. I am to join one with the other; fear with confidence, and confidence with fear. Fear will hinder presumption, whither too great a confidence might carry me. Confidence will prevent pusillanimity, to which an excess of fear would lead me. Both together will keep me from falling into either extreme, and restrain me within the just bounds, that wisdom prescribes. Above all things I will fear offending thee, as long as I remain in life. If I have been so unfortunate as to displease thee, I will return with confidence to throw myself into thy arms. For *thou desirest not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.* Ezec. xxxiii. 11.—Change and save me, and from a wholesome fear lead me to a perfect love.

ELEVENTH LESSON.

ON CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD

As it shall be the will of God in heaven, so be it done.—1 Machab. iii. 60.

Conformity to the will of God comprises three essential duties incumbent on us ; *viz.* to will what God wills ; to will it, as God wills ; to will it, because God wills it. Herein the virtue of perfect conformity consists. What God wills is the object of it ; as God wills, its model ; because God wills the motive of it.

How holy and happy should we be, O my God, if we thus conformed in all things to your adorable will ? It would be in some manner imitating the condition of the blessed in heaven, whose sole employ is to do your holy will in all things.

1st. We must will what God wills. This is the first step to be taken in the practice of conformity. In effect, what is more reasonable, what more just what more necessary? The will of God is always right, holy, and infallible : ours blind, inordinate, wavering, and uncertain, capable itself of being deceived, and of deceiving us. Are we not happy in having an infallible rule, which we may follow without fear of being led astray ? What God wills is necessarily good ; we have only to leave ourselves to his direction, and we shall be secure of being conducted safe through all dangers to our journey's end.

We must will what God wills, and whatever he wills, without exception or reserve. For, as in point of faith, our belief must embrace all articles, and an exception of any single one would essentially destroy the virtue of faith in us ; so, in regard to conformity, our resignation must extend to all things, and a refusal of acquiescing to any one degree of providence would show, that our conformity is deficient. What can we, what ought we to refuse thee, O my God? Would any reserve, that we make, prove to our benefit, or our unhappiness ?

Thus the man, who is resigned, conforms himself in all things to the will of God. In whatever state he is, whatever event, or circumstance happens, conformity to the divine pleasure is made the rule of his conduct, and therein he finds shelter in all dangers, and comfort in all his sufferings. If, after a course of uninterrupted happiness, where he saw every wish crowned with success, adversity succeeds, and a deluge of misfortunes breaks in upon him, he will cry out with Job: *If we have received good things at the hand of God* (Job ii. 10.) with thanks, *why should we not receive evil* with submission? If by a change of fortune he is bereft of his goods, and reduced to a state of want or mediocrity, he will add with the same Job: *The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord.* Job i. 21.—And to keep a still more perfect model constantly before his eyes, in whatever state he is, he will look up to his divine master, and, animated by his example and supported by his grace, will direct his prayer with him, to the eternal Father in heaven: *Not my will, but thine be done.* Luke xxii. 12.

Perhaps on some occasions the voice of nature will be heard, and beg to be freed from its sufferings; but grace will presently stifle the cry of nature, and a perfect conformity to the divine will take the ascendant over too great natural sensibility. Strike, chastise me, O my God, *the soul will cry*, and pursue thy holy intentions without regarding the weakness of my feelings. How noble are these dispositions, and how pleasing is a soul in thy sight, O Lord, when it makes these sacrifices at the foot of thy cross, from a principle of holy conformity?

2dly. We must will what God wills, and will it not in the manner he wills it. Such is our weakness or illusion, that we often acquiesce to the substance of God's decrees, but put in our caveats and exceptions as to the mode and circumstances of their being carried into execution. We submit to the things themselves but will have them done in a different manner.

For example, we resign patiently to the inconvenience of sickness; but we will not have our illness be so long nor so painful. We acquiesce to humiliations and affronts in general, but we cannot digest an affront of such a particular nature. Ingratitude is nothing less, than what we expect to meet with from the world; but was it to be expected from that person, whom we had loaded with our favours? In every other case we should have submitted without reluctance to the divine pleasure; but here we entreat God to pardon our weakness, if we find it difficult to be resigned. Vain pretexts and shameful exceptions, which the virtue of conformity condemns and rejects. Yea, Christian soul, thou must submit to whatever happens, from whatsoever cause, and in whatsoever manner and circumstances it happens to thee. In reality, to will what God wills, and not in the manner in which he wills it, is certainly withdrawing part of the sacrifice; and thou knowest, that *he hates robbery in a holocaust.* Isaias lxi. 8.—It would be giving him the tree, and reserving the fruit for thyself.

Always keep before thine eyes the example of thy divine Master. When his Father presents him the bitter chalice of his passion, his senses are alarmed, nature trembles with fear; but presently the virtue of conformity to his Father's pleasure, makes him willingly submit to the whole series of his torments. May all be accomplished, *not as I will*, says he, *but as thou wilt.* Matt. xxvi. 39, 42.—It is sufficient for me to know, that it is so determined in the decrees of thy adorable wisdom: *Thy will be done.*

What a noble example, but how few copiers of it are found? How many exceptions do we make? How many modifications? How many reserves? *O, thou* man *of little faith, why dost thou doubt* (Matt. xiv. 31.) of the goodness of thy God, and of the wisdom of his decrees?

3dly. We must will what God wills, as he wills it, and, finally, because he wills it. This is the perfection of conformity, and the completion of the holocaust,

which is offered by its hands. Let us have no other motive in accomplishing the will of God, than that will itself. In effect, what greater, what more sublime and holy motive can man propose to himself, than the known will of his God? Does it become us to wish to sound the designs of God, and ask him the reason of his conduct? Why is this, and how that? Be far from us such disrespectful inquiries. In matter of faith, why is this? Because God says it. And in point of conformity, why that? Because God wills it. Should not this motive alone suffice for us, and hold with us the place of every other motive and reason. Thus the will of your father, O adorable Saviour, was the grand motive, which made you submit to all the sufferings, humiliations and torments of your mortal life. Such, said you, is his pleasure, I joyfully submit to it. I will lead a suffering life, because he wills it; because he is pleased, that I should lead a life: *Yea, Father, for so it has seemed good in thy sight. Ibid.* xi. 26.

Noble and perfect disposition, from whence all blessings abundantly flow. In effect, by this holy conformity we change our own will into that of God, *viz.* a human and defective will into the perfect will of the divinity itself; and when once we are thoroughly conformed to the divine will, what advantages shall we not find in it? This conformity is the fruitful source of every blessing that man is capable of receiving.

It procures us a fulness of graces; God has promised to bestow them abundantly on a soul that is resigned.

A fulness of merits; can there be a more plentiful source of merit than this perfect conformity and abandoning of ourselves into the hands of God?

A fulness of comfort; what affords such comfort, as to throw ourselves into the arms of so tender a father?

A fulness of peace; can any thing disturb the calm of a soul, which reposes in the bosom of God?

A fulness of glory; what crowns are prepared in heaven for a soul thus resigned on earth?

MEDITATION.

ON A THOROUGH ABANDONING OF OURSELVES INTO THE HANDS OF GOD.

Let us consider the foundation upon the practice of abandoning of ourselves into the hands of God is established, and the sentiments it ought to produce in us. These O my soul, are the great truths, which serve as a base and foundation to this sublime virtue; let us ask of God to fix them immovably in our hearts.

1st. I am certain, that whatever happens in the world, happens either by the express command, or by the particular permission of God. God, as we know by faith, disposes of all things in such a manner, that, provided we put no obstacle to his designs, he will make all serve to his glory and our sanctification. *We know, that to them that love God, all things work together unto good.* Rom. viii. 28.

2dly. I am certain, that God knows, better than ourselves, what is suitable for us. He knows our natural disposition, our propensities, our weakness, our wants, our miseries, and hereupon he forms his wise designs, when we leave the disposal of ourselves to him: *He knows our frames, he remembers that we are dust.* Psalm cii. 14.

3dly. I am certain, that what things appear in human judgment the most contrary to our advantage and salvation, are often conducive to those purposes, when directed by God alone. Witness a Job on his dunghill, a Joseph in prison, a Daniel in the lion's den, a Moses on the waters of the Nile, as everlasting monuments erected to the honour of divine providence, and of conformity to its sacred decrees.

4thly. I am certain, that God has traced out to each one a particular road suited to his own person, by which he intends to lead him to heaven. It is a series of events, a concatenation of helps and graces which cannot be broken without interrupting the order of

Providence. Only God knows this road, and he alone can lead us through it.

5thly. I am certain, that this abandoning of ourselves into the hands of God must be with him a pressing motive to conduct us safe to the term of our happiness. Can he forsake a soul, which resigns itself entirely to him? Can a father refuse to receive to his embraces the child, who comes without fear to throw himself into his arms?

These are undoubted truths, as clear as the light of day, as certain as faith, as unchangeable as the being itself of God. Being convinced of them, let me make the application of them to myself, and say in the spirit of faith:

1st. Then it is true, that whatever happens to me happens by the particular permission of God: why therefore am I to be uneasy about any thing, that befalls me in this world? God either positively wills or permits it, and he knows the reasons why. Shall I not make him the absolute master of all my concerns? Can the cares, which I deposit in his paternal hands, fail of rendering me more dear to him?

2dly. God knows better than myself, what is suitable for me: it behooves me therefore to leave my lot entirely in his hands. What judgment should we form of a man, who, being exposed to the fury of a dangerous tempest, should wrest the rudder out of the hands of the pilot to steer his own vessel? What can he expect but certain shipwreck, being so much the more to be blamed as he wilfully draws the misfortune on himself?

3dly. Oftentimes the things, which appear most opposite to my well-being, are the means most conducing to it. How many convincing proofs hereof have I seen in life? When I recollect all that has happened to me, and the many singular events that have befallen me, how many tokens of God's mercy, how many wonderful marks of his providence do I discover? And how many other instances of the same providential mercy, perhaps more wonderful in the

eyes of God, are unknown to me? One day I shall know them, and bless him eternally for them.

4thly. God has marked out to each one a particular road to lead him to heaven; mine therefore is traced out with his own hand. If I undertake to guide myself, what reasons have I not to fear going astray, missing the road of my salvation, and entering into some by-path, which will end in my destruction? My own fancy and will are like those nocturnal vapours, which, dazzling the eye of the deluded traveller, engage him in precipices and gulfs.

5thly. If I abandon myself thoroughly into the hands of God, this resignation will be a new motive with him to conduct me safe to my term. In this view, what reserve ought I or can I make with him? God will not permit himself to be overcome in liberality; and in his regard it is certain, that the more we give the more we shall receive. A total abandoning therefore of myself into his hands, will insure to me his greatest mercy and favour.

If my conformity is established on these unshaken principles, can it fail of being complete? No, my God, there is nothing I can reserve from you, nothing that I can refuse abandoning into your hands. Such are my sentiments, and from these sentiments I take the following resolutions:

1st. I will often exercise in acts of holy conformity.

2dly. In all the afflictions of life I will ever say: these are ordained by God; it is incumbent on me to submit.

3dly. Under great trials, I will believe that the mercy of God has formed some particular design over me, and from thence submit myself more perfectly to his will.

4thly. I will nevertheless do what is requisite to be done on my side, lest, in lieu of resignation, I should become guilty of illusion, presumption, and even tempting God.

5thly. I will convince myself, that the road of holy conformity will lead me most securely to God; that it

is the most meritorious, the most comfortable, in a word, the most perfect.

THE COLLOQUY.

My God, my Saviour and my Father, I come to cast myself into your merciful arms, and abandon myself unreservedly to your providence. I believe, that you are infinitely wise, and know whatsoever is good, that you are infinitely bountiful, and never will any thing but what is good; whilst all power is lodged in your hands to execute the good you intend. You know better than myself whatever is conducive to my happiness and welfare. From this moment therefore, I abandon to you my whole being, all that I have and all that I can hope for, my understanding, with all its thoughts, with all its affections; my will, with all its desires for time and eternity. My will centres in yours; I will nothing but what you will, nothing but as you will, nothing but at the time and in the manner in which you will it.

I will ever conceive the greatest respect for, if I do not even delight in all that comes from your hands; and whatever you allow to happen to me from creatures shall meet with my submission. If you grant me comforts, your holy name be blessed; it is a favour, which I do not deserve. If you ordain crosses and afflictions for me, your holy name also be blessed; they are a chastisement, which I have but too justly merited. You are the absolute Master of my lot, of my fortune, my reputation, my health, my life. I resign all to you; from this moment I deposit all in your hands; nothing is any longer mine. Dispose of me according to your sovereign pleasure for prosperity and adversity, for poverty and riches, for sickness and health, for life and death, for time and eternity. All is yours; may I reserve nothing to myself.

May the sacrifice, which I offer at this moment, continue as long as my life; may it be renewed at the hour of my death; may it be my last thought and last

feeling, and by it may my soul be transmitted into your hands to praise and love you for ever.

TWELFTH LESSON.

ON THE CARE AND NEGLECT OF SMALL THINGS.

He that contemns small things, shall fall by little and little.—Eccles. xix. 1.

Two great truths occur to be considered on this subject. As there is no fault so inconsiderable, but which, in its consequences, may lead to the greatest excesses; so there is nothing so small in point of virtue, which, by an insensible progression, may not raise us to the most eminent sanctity.

There is no fault so inconsiderable, but which, in its consequences, may lead us to the greatest excesses; and that either by disposing the soul thereunto, by introducing illusion into the mind; by the permission of God in punishment of the first sin; or by way of temptation. What subject of reflection have we here? What cause of fear and just remorse!

1st. The smallest faults dispose by degrees to greater. When we habitually yield to small faults, we are insensibly led into greater. From sloth and negligence in the performance of our Christian duties we conceive a disgust of piety, grow hardened to the grace of God, and disregard the admonitions of conscience. To-day we abandon one exercise, to-morrow another: to-day we become guilty of infidelity, to-morrow a more remarkable unfaithfulness succeeds. As watchfulness and recollection diminish, weakness and dissipation increase upon us, together with more repugnance to good, and greater propensity to evil. Great are the strides we have already made to relaxation. In the meantime, the yoke of religion becomes every day more unpleasant, its weight more burdensome. We carry it: what do I say? We painfully drag it along, murmuring and complaining of it, and doing all that is

in our power, to cast it entirely off. In a word, we find, that we are no longer what we were, and by an unhappy and deplorable change we are become as dissipated and irregular, as heretofore we were virtuous and exact.

How many Christian characters are drawn in these few words? Heretofore reserved and fearing even a shadow of sin, at present running on blindly in the ways of perdition. Let them trace back the road they have passed; let them view the point, from whence they started, and examining the source of their evil, they will find, that their decay first began by retrenching prayer, by neglecting some practices of devotion, by lessening the exercise of piety. Here was the beginning. A contempt of the motions of grace, and slighting the stings of conscience, marked their progress. Finally, some notable infidelity, a wilful transgression against the known laws of God, followed perhaps by many other grievous trespasses, completed their ruin.

2dly. A neglect of small faults introduces illusion into the mind. It is but too common with persons, who have relaxed from their fervour, and fallen into sin, to seek for excuses for their relaxation and errors. Hence false principles and maxims are adopted to a false conscience. A thousand excuses and justifications are invented on the most frivolous grounds. They flatter themselves never to go beyond certain limits, which they prescribe themselves. But how easy is it to transgress the bounds, and thus fall into fatal illusion, particularly in certain matters, where the limits of good and evil stand so close together, that it is difficult to discern one from the other? How easy, for example, and at the same time how common is it to be deceived in point of purity, and to imagine faults to be slight and trivial, which are grievous and deadly? How easy to make the unhappy mistake in a dangerous thought, an inconsiderate look, a rising desire, when the heart is wavering between the feeling and consent, and unable to distinguish what is

from what is not, what it fears from what it loves, what it seeks for from what it resists? O fatal rock, where so many unthinking souls have been unhappily lost, and which is still occasioning so many unfortunate wrecks every day! In point of charity how often, by poignant jokes or masked detraction, do we grievously offend the feelings or reputation of our neighbour, and strike a deadly wound to his heart, whilst we are flattering ourselves, that our attempt is not felt by him?

To what length and excesses will not a fund of natural sloth and tepidity lead us? How many employs are neglected? How many duties postponed? How many talents are lost, whilst remorse is carefully soothed to silence, and conscience dares not speak a word? Thus we are blinded, thus we are led astray, and in the end unfortunately lost; and even a thousand times believing ourselves to be at a distance from the precipice, we have already fallen into the abyss. My God, how greatly ought we to deplore the blindness of men, but how greatly is the rigour of thy judgments to be dreaded?

3dly. God often permits Christians to fall into great faults in punishment of smaller neglects. The just Judge pronounced this awful sentence, which we see executed every day: *with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.* Matt. vii. 2.—As therefore he pours forth his choicest graces on faithful and generous souls, so he stops the course of his liberality to those, who are covetous and narrow-minded. Men need not indeed fear being deprived of common necessary graces, which providence, in its own justification, never fails to dispense, but justice will maintain its rights, and avenge the slights offered it, when its favours are contemned. We shall receive graces, which will indeed enable us to resist, but with which we shall be overcome; whilst choice and special graces shall be denied us. Such graces are not promised, nor are they due; much less are they merited. In punishment therefore of our infidelity in abusing common graces, God will withhold his special and choice

graces; and whilst our abuses are so great, what a dismal project have we before us? Will God be liberal to souls, which regard no faults, that do not appear deadly, and only are afraid of sinning, when they are afraid of being damned?

4thly. To complete the misery of a soul, which slights small faults, the devil gains new strength and power to assault it with temptation, and his attacks often prove so violent, that they work its entire ruin. No, to destroy a soul, Satan does not usually begin with proposing great crimes and excesses, the very idea of which creates horror; but insinuating himself by degrees into the heart of a man, who is off his guard, he suggests trifling amusements, distractions, and faults apparently of no consequence, which inure him little by little to the sight of danger. When the fear of offending is worn off, and small faults can be seen with indifference, he has no longer a dread of, falling even into the greatest. In a critical moment, under a violent temptation, the heart being already shaken, softened, and wavering, and the devil making his last effort, he begins to hesitate and doubt, and at length unfortunately yields. The dart is cast, the deadly wound is made, perhaps never to be healed. What does it import, whether the water oozes by degrees, or rushes all at once into the vessel, if it is swallowed by the waves; whether a small fire, or vast conflagration is kindled in a house, if it is consumed and reduced to ashes; whether a man go down step by step, or plunge himself at once from a precipice, if at length he sinks into the abyss.

Penetrate me, O great and righteous God, with a wholesome apprehension of the smallest dangers that I may be in; with a tender sorrow for my smallest faults, and more particularly with an ardent love for thee. May I fear displeasing thee more than any torments; may the bare name of sin and unfaithfulness, great or small, make me tremble; may I dread nothing so much as the guilt of sin, no not death or hell itself. It is in this manner, that thou

art served by those who sincerely love, and are affectionately devoted to thee.

MEDITATION.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

It is a most comfortable reflection, O my God, for a soul like mine, which is little capable of great actions, to think that fidelity in small things will insensibly raise it to the most eminent sanctity. The reason whereof is, that small things dispose to great; small occasions are more frequent, and consequently give a greater opportunity of merit; faithfulness in small things draws down the greatest graces; finally, small sacrifices, however trifling each particular may be, yet taken together, and continued for a long time, become very considerable. What an abundant source of grace and merits, if we know how to enrich ourselves from it?

Disclose these treasures to me, O my God, and help me by your graces to avail myself of them. As my natural weakness deprives me of an opportunity of great sacrifices, I can only raise to sanctity by this insensible progression in good; and may I never be so unfaithful as to neglect it.

1st Point. Small things dispose to greater. It is an error to imagine, that sanctity consists in great actions, or that we can attain to sanctity all at once. No, it is only by an insensible progression that Christians usually became saints. The road of sanctity is not run over in a day; the journey is long, and we must advance in it step by step. As we advance, we shall acquire strength, and form habits of virtue; but it is only by practising what is easy, that we can rise to the most difficult, and by fidelity in small things, that we shall acquire generosity in greater. Sanctity is not purchased but by victories: small victories open the way to greater; and unless small victories precede, great conquests seldom are made. It is a vain illusion to fancy, that we shall resist violent assaults, when we

are unable to withstand small attacks; or that we shall walk on with many strides, when, like children, we are tottering at every step.

Do you wish to come to your journey's end? Try your strength, dispose yourself for heroic sacrifices, by generously offering the sacrifices that are to be made every day; let small advantages prepare you for greater victories; be the courageous soldier in small rencounters, and you will be the invincible hero in the most trying engagements; that is, if you are faithful in small things, you will also be faithful in great.

He, that is faithful in that which is least, said the Saviour of mankind, *is faithful also in that which is greater;* Luke xvi. 10.—the truth of which sentence faithful souls experience every day. If hitherto I have not been convinced of it, I must accuse my own unfaithfulness both in small and great things; this has occasioned the langour and faintness, which I unhappily experience; to this I must attribute my not advancing in virtue, and my frequent falling back from the little good I practised. Nevertheless I hardly ever think of bewailing my situation; but since you, my God, make me at present sensible of it, help me by your grace to go forth from so dangerous a state.

2d. Point. Fidelity in small things will raise us to sanctity; because the occasions of making small sacrifices being more frequent and common, they consequently become a more fruitful source of merit. Small streams form by degrees large rivers, and the traveller by short journeys at length arrives at his wished for home. It is in vain to wait for occasions of distinguishing ourselves by great actions, as such occasions seldom happen, and to many even never happen at all. The man, who should propose being virtuous only by means of great sacrifices, might remain disappointed all his life long. Thus we are led into illusion, and lose our time in empty projects: whilst we expect occasions of making great sacrifices, which do not offer, we neglect availing ourselves of smaller opportunities, that fall in our way. Some-

means of sanctifying ourselves are neglected with full deliberation; others we fly from through pusillanimity and faintness of heart; and thus we neither grow better by the one or the other.

The road, which you trace out to us, O adorable Saviour is different. *These things*, you say to us, *you ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* Luke xi. 42.—This is the rule which the just follow, and what treasures of merits do they acquire by the faithful observance of it.

It is to the neglect of this rule, that I must ascribe my own little advancement in virtue. I have had innumerable occasions of sanctifying myself, and my cowardice has made me neglect them. After many years I am still, as it were, at the very entrance of the road, that leads to sanctity, whilst others are far advanced in their course. Shall I continue to live in this indifference? Shall I close the day of my life without ever having attended to the just remorses of conscience, which represent my negligence to me? Or shall I know my fault, and not have courage to correct it? I am sensible of what God demands of me; I see the road to holiness open before me; if I have not resolution to enter into it, shall I ever arrive at my journey's end?

3d Point. Fidelity in making small sacrifices will bring us to sanctity, because, however trifling each particular may be, the whole taken together, and continued for a long time, become greatly burdensome. They, who have had experience hereof, understand what I say. It is easier to contemn the practice of self-denial in small things, than to follow it. In effect, do men know what is meant by it? Do they understand the signification of these great names in a spiritual life, perpetual mortification, perpetual violence, perpetual subjection? What do they import, but a continual sacrifice, a continual martyrdom, a continual dying to all things. It is little, if you will, yea, it is little to overcome one-self in one thing; but to overcome one-self in all things is truly great. It is little

to deny ourselves a certain thing at one time, but great never to indulge our inclination in any. It is a little to repress a sudden motion of impatience in one occasion; but great always to preserve the same equality of temper. It is a little to bear with the rudeness and ill nature of a person, with whom we live, one day, or one month; but to bear it all our life long, every day, at each moment, what conflicts, what resolution, what invincible patience are necessary? Yes, though the thing were slighter in itself, yet if it is common and habitual, the very idea of acquiescing to it is so terrifying to nature, that the greatest hearts are staggered at it, and nothing but an heroical courage can surmount the difficulty of submitting to this uninterrupted mortification at all times. In effect, many would willingly suffer the torments of a bloody execution, that should be completed in a moment, and would fly from the mortification of denying themselves continually in small things. How many would bear a short and severe illness, and cannot support the tediousness of a languishing disorder? How many would acquiesce to be put instantaneously to death, and would not submit to the slow martyrdom of a long and painful life?

Let us call the sacrifices small; what is there great, O my God, that we can do for you, feeble and imperfect creatures as we are? We call them small, but if greater occasions presented, should we avail ourselves of them, or rather not believe them to be above our strength?

Though they were small, if God deigns to accept of them, ought not we to repute them great?

We call them small, but have we tried them, and do we judge of them from our own experience?

If we call them small, and regard them as such, are we not more culpable in refusing to acquiesce to them?

The sacrifices are small, but it is by means of these, that the greatest saints have, in length of time, become saints?

If they are small, yet how great are the motives, how noble the sentiment, how ardent the fervour, which command and influence them; and consequently what treasures of merits are acquired? What recompenses are deserved?

Thou sayest it, O Divine Lord: *Well done, thou good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* Matt. xxvi. 21.—Yes, God never allows himself to be overcome in liberality; if we are faithful, he is superiorly generous; if we avail ourselves of all occasions of testifying our love to him, he profusely pours forth his gifts upon us. Now fidelity draws down new graces, and by a happy concatenation of fidelity and graces, of graces seconded by fidelity, and fidelity rewarded by graces, we rise from virtue to virtue, from merits to merits, from perfection to perfection, till we arrive at the holy mountain of God, the summit of sanctity.

God is great; he regards the heart, not the actions. If we act through love for God, all will be great in his sight, and he will crown our endeavours to please him with an infinite reward.

Conclude, from the foregoing considerations: 1st. When small occasions of denying yourself are offered, to remember, that God sees your situation, and demands that token of fidelity from you.

2dly. Often to promise, in atonement of your past unfaithfulness, to refuse nothing to God, by which you can testify your love to him.

3dly. To reflect, if you let slip any occasion of mortifying yourself, that the ardour of God's love to you will be cooled, and you punished with stings and remorses of conscience.

4thly. To prescribe yourself a certain number of self-denials and acts of mortification every day, as so many tokens of your love of God.

5thly. To unite the little you do to the merits of Jesus Christ, by which means all your mortifications will be sanctified and made worthy of God's acceptance.

THE COLLOQUY.

What treasures of graces and merits have been open to me, O my God? They have been daily placed before me, and I have not enriched myself with them. Ah! it was my negligence, that made me disregard them. I did not understand their value; because I would not practise the virtues, that were necessary to put me in possession of them. Had I done it, how happy should I have been, incapable as I am of great things, to have supplied the deficiency of my virtue by small sacrifices, and to have seen my feeble endeavours to please you accepted by you? O merciful God, what a grace and favour is it on your part to set down such small things to account in our behalf, and to reward them, as if they were great? Shall I still be so faithless as to refuse you these small things? No, my God, I understand too well the loss I have hitherto suffered, and the blessings, of which I have deprived myself by neglecting them. My study henceforward shall be to omit nothing that can appertain to your service, to avail myself of the smallest things to purchase heaven, and to repair my past negligence by an inviolable fidelity, in observing all the points of your holy law for the future, hoping for the reward, which you have promised to an exact observance of it, according to those words: *because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things.*

THIRTEENTH LESSON.

ON THE DEATH OF A SINNER.

The death of the wicked is very evil.—Psalm xxxiii. 22.

An unhappy death generally is the end of a sinful life. If death were necessarily to open a door of eternal happiness to us, so far from fearing we ought to desire and sigh after it; but if death is to be followed by the greatest of miseries, and the end of time to be-

come the beginning of an unhappy eternity, with what feelings must a guilty soul, whose life has been a continued series of crimes, and chain of disorders, be penetrated at the approach of death? Such is the exit of the sinner: during his life he was in plenty, joy and prosperity: at death there remains nothing for him but regret and fear; regret for what he loses, and fear for what he expects. What a dreadful change? What a terrible dissolution? Did we come into this world to die thus?

1st. The dying sinner finds himself in a state of privation of all things, and of utter desolation at the hour of his death. In effect, in losing life, how great are the losses he sustains? He suffers a loss of the goods, which he possesed; a loss of the friends, with whom he was connected; a loss of the objects, to which he was endeared; and what is worst of all, a loss of the graces which he abused. What therefore does he keep but his sins and remorses of conscience?

But his state of desolation is still more deplorable. He is plunged into the deepest distress from the violent torments of his sickness, which is hurrying him to the grave. Alas! what a lamentable situation for a soul, which has not religion to soften its pains? The just man shall suffer at death, it is true; we do not die without pain; but the just man being accustomed to suffer, and to mortify his body and the senses, has prepared himself for death by the penitential rigours and austerities, which he has voluntarily undergone. If the just man suffers, he is resigned; he offers up his sufferings in atonement for his sins; he unites them to the sufferings of his suffering and dying God; and thus finds them sweetened with the unction of divine grace, and the hope of an eternal recompense. The sinner, on the contrary, not being inured to suffer and mortify himself, attached to his ease and convenience, a lover of carnal pleasure, feels all the sharpness of the last anguishes of death; and in the height of his torments has no alleviation, from the consideration of eternal motives and the hope of future happiness.

Hence those frequent impatiences, those disquiets and agitations of mind, those violent transports, in which he often appears, so as to distress and afflict his attendants, and frustrate the utmost efforts of their tenderness and assiduity, which are all unable to assuage the torments he is in.

Just God; these are the threats, which you announced to the sinner, and which we unhappily see accomplished every day. *I called and you refused,* say you to him: *I stretched out my hand,* and during life you *regarded not: you despised all my counsel and neglected my reprehensions:* Prov. i. 24, 25.—you slighted my law and upbraided my precepts; my vengeance must be accomplished in you, by delivering you over to the horrors of an unhappy death: *I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock, when that shall come to you, which you feared.* Prov. 26.—O dreadful chastisement of sin!

That it is *a bitter thing* for the sinner *to have left the Lord* his *God* (Jer. ii. 19.) during life, and to see himself forsaken by him at death. If he had served God, as men serve the world, if he had been as faithful to God as men are to the world, would he at the hour of death experience the anguish and remorses, which torture his sinful soul?

2dly. The thought of futurity is still more distressing to the dying sinner. He sees a futurity opened before him, and what an alarming prospect does this futurity present to his affrighted eyes! He sees that a future state is certain, that it is hurrying on towards him, that it is dreadful in its nature, that it is unavoidable, that it is eternal. What terrors are included in each of these considerations?

The sinner sees that futurity is certain. During life, the world, passion and sin enfeebled and changed the faith of the sinner, so that it was hardly subsisting in him. He had only a faint, languid, and, as it were, a death faith; its lights were eclipsed; he called in doubt some of the truths of it, or perhaps impiously impugned its tenets. But the feeble spark, which was

covered over with the ashes of so many passions, and appeared in a manner dead, is rekindled at the approach of death; it recovers its force; its light is clear and no longer obscured with the clouds of passion; doubts vanishing, and darkness being dispelled, truth stands in open view before him; the sinner sees the certainty of a future state, but like the *devils* he only *believes and trembles* (James ii. 19.) at it, without amending himself by the prospect of what is set before him.

The sinner sees, that futurity is hastening on towards him. During life he drove the thought of a future state from his mind; he promised himself a long course; he viewed the objects of futurity through a perspective, which cast them at a great distance from him, it enters his very door, and stands by him. The sinner perceives, that a just God is going to cut the thread of his unhappy life, that he calls upon him to appear before his dreadful tribunal, and that he must enter upon the career of a future state. Ah! what different impressions do objects make, when placed close to us, from what they do at a distance? *In the morning*, says he to himself, that is in a short time, perhaps to-morrow, *I shall stand before* my God, *and I shall see* (Psalm v.) the multitude of my sins, the greatness of my abuses of grace, I shall meet a severe and inexorable Judge. The sinner sees, that a future state is dreadful in its nature. Futurity is to decide his lot. During life he kept his eyes shut for fear of seeing too much, and of interrupting the course of his pleasures, to which alone he was sensible. At present he sees the consequence of his carnal life, he sees what is to come, and all the horrors of a future state. And what a dreadful prospect must this futurity display to him when he knows, that he is entering upon it without any other preparation, than that of a sinful life, and that he has nothing to carry with him but the crimes he has committed, and graces, which he has abused. Justly did the Apostle say, that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, (Heb. x. 31.) that is, of an exasperated God, whose vengeance must take place.

The sinner sees, that futurity is unavoidable. The hand of God is lifted against him, *and there is no man that can deliver* him *out of* that chastising *hand.* Job x. 7.—No, my God, the dying sinner cannot shelter himself from thy darts; futurity is going to involve him in its melancholy darkness; thy wrath hems him in on all sides, and no asylum is opened to his affrighted soul. It is to thee, that he should have had recourse, and his sins seem to have closed the entrance of thy heart against him. Thou followedst him all his life long to reclaim and bring him back; as a rebellious Jonas, he fled from thy face: thou now comest up to him with the dreadful weapon in thy hand; he trembles under thy arm, and that arm is raised to discharge the deadly blows upon him and sacrifice him to thy anger.

The sinner sees, that futurity is eternal, which is the most alarming circumstance of all. If he had only a determinate number of years or ages to weep and suffer, he would at length see an end of his torments and misery; but eternity is always beginning, and never will have an and. No, when he is once entered on this dreadful eternity, there is no return for him, no mercy to be expected; mercy had its time; the reign of justice now begins to continue for ever. From hell there is no redemption.

What frights and terrors must the consideration of these dreadful subjects strike into the heart of the dying man, if he is in a condition of thinking and reflecting?

He might return to God and benefit himself of the moments which God still leaves him, if he pleased: it is his undoubted duty so to do, and his sorrow would be accepted, if it were sincere. But of what does he find himself capable in this state of trouble and consternation? The chaos of his conscience is so immense, the guiltiness of his life so dreadful, the heinousness of his crimes so enormous, that he knows not how to undertake the work, nor where to begin. Besides, by a dreadful chastisement of the impenetra-

ble decrees of the Almighty, the sinner at these moments is often abandoned to himself, and *delivered up* to his own *reprobate sense*. Rom. i. 28.—Overwhelmed with pains, his bodily strength spent, perhaps despairing of salvation, he sinks blindly into eternity, which his impiety and irreligion would still make him fancy, if possible, not to be as durable and dreadful, as faith represents it to him. But whereunto do these doubts serve, but to increase the subject of his just terrors and alarms?

Hence he is sometimes seen in such troubles and agitations, such frights and tremblings, that he strikes horror into the hearts of all those who behold him: they imagine, that his tortures are the effect of bodily illness; but they are deceived. It is the disquieted state of his soul, that occasions these troubles; he stands in consternation at the approach of death, and is terrified at the sight of God's judgments, which in a short time must fix his lot with the unfortunate damned. The unhappy man expires, he is no more, his doom is settled, his soul is plunged into hell.

O my God, how melancholy and doleful is the death of a sinner? Preserve me from so fatal an end: punish me in this life, and wait not till death make me experience the severity of your justice. I will labour the remaining part of my life to deserve a more happy death.

MEDITATION.

ON THE DEATH OF A JUST MAN.

1st. The just man dies without regret for what he leaves.

2dly. He dies full of confidence on account of what he expects.

How great a happiness is it, O my God, thus to finish the course of our mortal life to enter at length into the blessed mansions of the living; I was created for this happiness: but, alas! is a life void of good works a suitable preparation to obtain a happy death?

Assist me, great God, to devote the remainder of my days to the purchasing of this greatest of happinesses, which I still hope for from your goodness.

1st Point. The just man dies without regret for what he leaves. No one can be assured of being just before God, because, as faith teaches us, *man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred.* Ecclesiastes ix. 1.—Nevertheless though we cannot be certain of enjoying the friendship of God, yet by a sincere sorrow and detestation of our sins, by the intimate testimony of an upright conscience, by a holy confidence in God, we may hope to find grace in his sight, having nothing essential to reproach ourselves with before him. It is in this sense, that a man may be called just, and it is only of such a one, that it can be said, that he dies without regret for what he leaves. In effect, what regret can he have?

1st. He quits the world; but in leaving it, what does he quit? He quits a treacherous, an unjust, an ungrateful, and perfidious world; which, when he has known it, can give him no subject of sorrow. The only sorrow, if he has any, is for having been too much attached to it, having followed too long its deceitful maxims and illusions, having been influenced by its scandals and bad examples. The heart of the just man is dead to the world, and the world has been long dead to him. Nothing is to be lost, when we are disengaged from all.

2dly. He quits his temporal goods, death deprives him of them: but he was not attached to those goods, he cleaved to no thing, he enjoyed the conveniences of the world, *as though* he *possessed* them *not;* 1 Cor. vii. 30.—he had already abandoned them in heart and spirit, and set no value on them. He joyfully therefore makes the sacrifice of all to God, and if he wishes for more, it is only, that the sacrifice might be more extensive; death divests him of nothing, but of the prison of his body; every other possession is foreign to him.

2dly. He quits his parents and friends, which, it is

true, are a sensible sacrifice; but knowing it to be ordained by God, that he should quit them for a time, and leave them in his hands, he hopes to have them one day returned to him in a more joyful state. Darling offspring, he cries, beloved wife, my tender friends, we must part, since God will have it; but let us hope to be reunited one day in heaven. He leaves them, but God holds to him the place of all, and he will one day recover all in God. This is not losing his friends; he is separated from them for awhile, but they will meet again in the mansions of bliss never more to be disjoined. He goes before them to prepare the road, and will wait for them in the glory of heaven.

4thly. He quits life, but, alas! a melancholy and perishable life, a life subject to so many miseries and troubles, and more so to the numberless dangers and temptations, to which it is exposed, of offending God and incurring his displeasure. He has no regret in losing it; he feels even a comfort in making the sacrifice of it to God; he offers it up in a spirit of penance for his sins, in a spirit of conformity to the divine will, in union with the offering of Jesus Christ, and in acknowledgment of the necessary dependence, which he has on the supreme being of God, and with these sentiments he would wish to have a thousand lives to offer to him.

Far therefore from fearing, the just man desires death; he longs and sighs for it after the example of David and St. Paul: *wo is me, that my sojourning is prolonged:* Psalm cxix. 5.—and, *who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* Rom. vii. 24.—Thus all the saints sighed for the end of their labours, and the term of their banishment.

My God, how acceptable must this sacrifice be to you, and how comfortable to the just man, to give up his soul into your hands in such dispositions? You intrusted it to him for a time, you demanded it back from him, to deposit it safely in the mansions of your eternal bliss.

Ah! what is life? We are fancying, that we live,

and we are dying every day. We are wedded to this perishable life, which fleets away, and we lose sight of the true life, to which God calls us. Enlighten our understandings, O my God, touch our hearts, sanctify all our moments, that they may each contribute to bring us to a participation of the joys of eternal life.

2d Point. The just man dies full of confidence, on account of what he expects.

He expects to meet in God a tender father, and not an angry and severe Judge.

He expects a life preferable to this perishable and mortal life, where he only finds lamentation and sorrow.

He hopes not through his own merits, but from the infinite goodness of his God, to receive a place amongst the Elect.

He hopes, at his departure from this land of banishment, to be admitted to the perfect view and enjoyment of God. Heaven seems to open its gates to him; the saints stretch forth their arms to embrace him; a blissful eternity is ready to receive him.

No, death to him is not death; it is the beginning of a lasting and immortal eternity; it is the end of a loathsome imprisonment and irksome banishment; it is a secure haven after the fury of raging storms and tempests; it is the entrance of the land of the living, and of the heavenly country, whither the just man is going.

O death, how bitter is thy remembrance to the man, who has peace in his riches, and in the deluding pleasures of his fleeting life? But how pleasing is the thought of thee to him, who has lived, as though he had not lived, by dying continually to himself and to all created things?

How lovely is the sight of the harbour to the wearied sailor, after the dangers of a long and tempestuous voyage? How pleasing is freedom after a painful and tedious imprisonment? How delightful is peace after the perils and toils of innumerable conflicts?

So shall the just man be delighted, when he reflects

at death, that he has renounced the pleasures of the world, that he has sacrificed his carnal inclinations, that he has mortified his passions, that he has laboured during life for the only interesting affair upon earth, his eternal salvation. With what joy shall he reap the fruit of his conflicts and sufferings? How feelingly shall he experience the truth of those words: *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints?* Psalm cxv. 15.

True it is, as I said before, that the just man cannot be absolutely sure of his lot; he is still to fear both his own sins and the judgments of God. But detesting his sins now more than ever, and having prepared himself to the best of his power for the dreadful judgment of God, he places his whole confidence in him, and though he fears, he still hopes for all from the mercy and goodness of God. He casts himself into his arms, and with his last breath offers the last awful sacrifice to him. The moment is come, the work is over, he dies: no, my God, he begins now to live in thee, who art the true life; he passes from his place of banishment to the mansions of the Elect, to the eternal abodes, where peace and everlasting happiness dwell.

Depart then, just soul, enter into the bosom of Abraham; go and take possession of the heavenly inheritance, which is reserved for thee; go and live for ever the true life of the Elect: and thou, merciful and bounteous God, have compassion on the last sighs of the just man, sweeten the agonies of his death, sanctify his sufferings, till released from pain he enters into the enjoyment of the happy liberty of the children of God.

Conc.ude, from the foregoing considerations: 1st. Always to endeavour to live the life of saints, that you may always be prepared for death.

2dly. To die to yourself and all things, and generously quit the world, before death bereaves you of it.

3dly. To look upon each day as perhaps the last of your life; often to beg of God the grace of a happy

death, to hope for it from his infinite mercy, frequently to make the sacrifice of your life to God in union with the sacrifice of Christ upon his cross; finally, not only to prepare yourself, but to be in actual readiness at all times for death.

THE COLLOQUY.

THOU sayest, my God, that *the death* of thy *saints* is *precious in* thy *sight*. Psalm cxv. 15.—But to die the death of saints I must live the life of saints. Can I, after having strayed so far from the paths of holiness, still hope to obtain this precious death? It is only from thy mercy, my God, that I can hope for it. Have pity on me; forsake not my soul in its last moments; give me not up to bitter torments and anguish of the death of sinners: be my support and comfort, when I am to depart out of this life. Thou diedst for me; may I live henceforward only for thee, that at my last hour I may find grace in thine eyes, and give up my soul into thine hands. *Let my soul die the death of the Just, and my last end be like to them.*—Numb. xxiii. 10.

FOURTEENTH LESSON.

ON THE PEACE OF GOD.

The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.—Phil iv. 7.

A SOUL is said to enjoy interior peace, when it has the happiness of living in the favour and friendship of God; when, though not able any more than the great Apostle was, to say, that it is absolutely justified, can yet render this pleasing testimony to itself in the presence of God, that its conscience reproaches it with nothing; when it can reasonably hope, if it were called to appear before the judgment-seat of God, that it would find grace in his eyes. The means to obtain

true peace is to avoid carefully all wilful and deliberate faults, however small they may be; to be inviolably faithful to the calls of grace, and fear nothing so much as disobeying its voice, and particularly to retrench whatsoever can disturb the calm and peace of the Holy Ghost, as doubts, remorses of conscience, troubles, disquiets and anxieties. If a soul is in doubts, it must clear them up; if it suffers remorses of conscience, it must remove the cause of them; if it is under trouble, affliction and disquiet, it must patiently resign itself to the will of heaven; and being thus sheltered from doubts, stings of conscience and troubles, its whole employ will be to serve God, to observe his holy law, to live in a wholesome fear of his judgments, at the same time having a confidential trust in him.

Such is the nature of interior peace, and such the base and foundation upon which it rests. A thousand times happy the soul, which enjoys this peace, which knows the value of it, and secures the possession of it to itself. Let us judge hereof by the unspeakable wonders, which this peace works in a soul, and by the inexplicable delights, a thousand times preferable to the pleasures of the senses, which it makes a soul feel: *the peace of God surpasseth all understanding.*—Phil. iv. 7.

When this peace enters a soul, all blessings enter together with it, order, calm, tranquillity, sweetness, comfort, joy, which make it cry out in the words of the wise man: *all good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands.* Wisdom vii. 11.—The soul, finding itself introduced by means of peace into the company and presence of its God, rests contented in its situation: it neither feels disquiet, nor trouble, nor fright; all its passions subside in a profound calm; it is unsusceptible of any displeasing alterations; God commands and possesses it in the fulness of peace; peace and God dwell together in the soul.

When peace enters a soul, the soul is made the true

kingdom of God, according to those words: *Lo, the kingdom of God is within you.* Luke xvii. 21.—God wishes to reign in souls, but he can only reign in them in peace; his dwelling is not commotion. When a soul is disturbed, it resembles a state convulsed with civil wars, and torn in pieces by intestine divisions. Broils, dissension, animosities, frights, slaughter, destruction, are seen on all sides. On the contrary, in a peaceful state all is calm, and tranquillity: the laws are observed, virtue honoured, the people happy, the sovereign respected; this pleasing peace becomes, as it were, the soul of the empire, diffusing itself through all the members of it to animate them, and spread peace and plenty around. Such is the figure of the kingdom of God in a soul. By peace the soul becomes the throne, the dwelling and empire of God, which he is pleased to adorn and enrich with all his heavenly perfections. He sanctifies it with his presence, he rules it by his authority, he protects it by his power, he endows it with his bounties; and being by excellency the King of peace, he chooses to reign in the midst of the peaceful blessings, which his liberality bestows. *The peace of God surpasseth all understanding.*

Bring peace into a soul, and that soul will then become like to an immense ocean in a profound calm. If the winds blow, if storms rise, if the billows roll, then it is the reign of horror and confusion: but if a calm prevails, you will see the whole face of nature changed, a placid quietness pervades the extent of the immense plain; serenity reigns in the heavens above, and tranquillity on the expanded waters beneath; all together representing to us a most beautiful picture of a soul in peace. The immense extent of the ocean shows us the unlimited sway, which a soul in peace exercises over itself; the depth of the sea figures the profound peace, which it enjoys; the unmeasurable quantity of its waters represents the innumerable blessings, which peace contains in its bosom, and which it pours forth abundantly on a soul, that it possesses; *the peace of God surpasseth all understanding.*

But let us speak of peace in a different light. A soul in peace becomes the faithful mirror of God and of his divine perfections. No, nothing represents so strongly and lively the eternal Majesty of God, as the unalterable quiet of a just soul in peace. For as nothing is so common among men, as trouble, uneasiness, changes and vicissitudes, so when a soul constantly enjoys itself in the repose of an undisturbed peace, it seeems to be raised above the condition of humanity, and resembles in some manner the divinity itself. What gives us so great an idea of God, and makes us admire so much his sovereign being, as to see him always the same, always unchangeable, always without variation, always immovable? His peace, his calm, his eternal decrees, his happiness never vary. Such is God, and a soul in peace is the lively image of him. What can there be more noble and grand than to behold a soul always free from trouble and agitation, always invariable in its maxims, always peaceful, always in the same state of quiet and tranquility, always intimately possessing itself? It is a noble figure of the unalterable perfections of God. The heavens represent his glory; the earth represents his steadiness; the sea represents his depth and immensity: but a peaceful soul represents the happy combination of his divine perfections, centred in one immovable point: *the peace of God surpasseth all understanding.*

But let us carry our contemplation on the nature of internal peace still farther. A soul in peace seems to be admitted already to a participation of the joy and happiness of the Elect. For what makes the bliss of the saints in heaven is the unalterable peace, by which they are enabled to enjoy the sight of the divine perfections, and relish the unspeakable beauties of God; through this peace their hearts are overspread with joy; by it they are made masters of all things, that their souls can wish for; in this peace they live, and will live and reign for ever.

Hence a soul in peace has already some idea and foretaste of the joys of heaven; even in the miseries

of this life it still cannot lose sight of the bliss of the Elect, whilst the peace, which it enjoys, remains as a secure pledge of its coming to a participation of the same happiness afterwards.

Place such a soul in the different situations, in which it may be in life: consider it under the various references, which it may have to God, to its neighbour and itself, and see what prodigies this heavenly peace will work in it.

In regard to God what sentiments of submission, resignation, dependence? What inviolable fidelity in following the calls of his grace? What conformity to the decrees of his providence? What utter abandoning of itself into his hands? What perfect union with, and what ardent love of God?

In regard to its neighbour, what feelings of bounty charity, condescension, and affability? It neither harbours resentment, nor bitterness, nor rancour, nor jealousy, nor envy; these not being the sentiments of peace, are not to be found in such a soul. It only sees faults to bear with them, wants to solace them, miseries to have compassion on them.

In regard to itself, it always preserves the same evenness of disposition in whatever circumstances it is. Let whatever events happen, let what will befall it, nothing disturbs, and casts it down: in the loss of all things it still finds all again in the possession of its peace. If its goods are taken away, if its fortune fails, if its health decays; yea, though the world should perish, the peace of its mind not being disturbed, it will rise greater in the midst of destruction, and from the ruin of all things around it, will raise up resplendent trophies in honour of the God of peace.

Such are its dispositions in regard to temporal things, and such also are its feelings in regard to the practices of religion. Every where peace commands in the soul, and every where peace teaches it what it has to do.

If in the retirement of its oratory it offers the homage of its prayer to God, it goes to it with confidence,

and remains at it with joy, as long as it is in presence of the God of peace. If it approaches the tribunal of penance, it regards it as the sacrament of its reconciliation with God; when it looks upon its sins, it is humbled and confounded at the sight of them, but not disheartened and dejected; it becomes itself the accuser of its own misdemeanors at the tribunal of peace, and is wholly comforted and transported with delight, when the minister of reconciliation pronounces the comfortable words to it: *Go in peace.* Mark v. 34.

On the days of its being admitted to the holy Eucharist, it goes to receive the God of peace in the same peaceful dispositions. Peace prepares the road for him; peace ornaments the house in which he is to dwell; peace calls forth an assemblage of virtues to embellish the seat of his rest; and when this God of bounty approaches, peace itself stands at the door to receive him and introduce him triumphantly into the peaceful soul.

Thus peace governs and directs, comforts and supports the just man during the course of his life; it follows him also to death, and then more than ever, is particularly lavish of its favours to him.

Let us go over in spirit to the bedside of that dying man, and attend his last critical moments. What do we behold? Horrors encompass him on all sides; every thing seems to combine to strike him with terror and consternation; death stands before him brandishing his deadly weapon; the grave opens to swallow him up; eternity stretches forward to involve him in its impenetrable darkness. But, lo! the blissful peace approaches; at her presence the melancholy gloom disperses, frights and consternation vanish, death has no longer the terrors, that seemed to attend it, eternity itself appears as a long-wished for haven after a perilous voyage. A calm taking entire possession of the soul, it resigns itself peaceably into the hand of its Creator; its last sighs are desirous to be dissolved in peace, and to meet its tender Father; it looks upon the end of mortality only as the beginning of a lasting

and immortal life, eternity as the land of the living, since it knows, that by excellency it is the land of peace.

Such are the power and charms of this celestial virtue. O heavenly peace, where dost thou reside? Art thou to be found upon earth, or have we not rea son to fear, that disdaining this world thou hast taken thy flight to a distant region, and fixed thy dwelling in some unknown land? Whither shall we go in search of thee? Shall we transport ourselves beyond the boundaries of the sea to the extremities of the earth to find thee? If we meet with thee there, what shall we give to purchase thee? What valuable price shall we lay down to enter into possession of thee?

Faithful soul, it is in thyself that thou shalt find and enjoy peace, if thou sincerely desirest it. Peace seeks for no other place to dwell in than hearts duly prepared for it; dispose thy own, and it will take up its abode with thee, and establish its kingdom in thee, together with the kingdom of the God of peace.

MEDITATION.

ON THE MEANS OF ACQUIRING AND PRESERVING PEACE OF SOUL.

Peace of Soul being so great and necessary a blessing, there are no means, of which I ought not to make use to acquire and preserve it.

Point out to me those means, O my God. I only wish to know and make use of them, to acquire the valuable treasure of peace, which the world cannot give, and which your grace alone bestows.

The first means to acquire and preserve peace is to fly from sin. Sin is the implacable enemy of peace; it is the sword, that pierces it through; it is a gnawing worm and destructive poison, that eats it away: sin and peace never could agree together: what peace can a soul enjoy, which knows, that it is an enemy to its God?

Truly so, my God, nothing is more conformable to the decrees of your eternal wisdom and justice. What can be more equitable than that, when we forfeit your grace, we should be deprived of the sweets of peace:

when we become your enemies, we should prove enemies to ourselves; when we seek our comfort out of you, we should experience affliction of mind and trouble of heart? How great would our misfortune be, if, being plunged in sin, we should be peaceful in it? What unhappiness to live in the midst of disorder, and yet enjoy peace? Would it not be a certain sign, that you had forsaken us, and abandoned us to our own errors? In effect, what remedy could there be for sin, if by interior disquiet you did not make the sinner understand, that he is not in your sight what he ought to be, that he is to suffer trouble as long as he abides in sin, and that being bereft of peace, he necessarily is lost to all happiness? Yes, the word is pronounced, and we see the accomplishment of the dreadful oracle every day: *there is no peace to the wicked, says the Lord*, (Isaias xlviii. 21.) but a guilty soul shall ever find its own punishment in itself.

Be then thou thoroughly convinced of, O my soul, and never forget, this important truth; that to enjoy peace, thou must carefully fly from sin, fear sin, and tremble at the sight of it, as at the *face of a serpent*, Ecclesiasticus xxi. 2.—and be for ever assured, that the moment thou consentest to it, peace will fly from thee; and what will sin be able to present thee in its stead, to indemnify thee for the loss thou sustaineth in losing thy peace, the only desirable blessing in the world?

The second means to acquire and preserve peace is to avoid all deliberate unfaithfulness to God, and wilful resistance to the calls of his grace. *Who hath resisted him*, said the Holy Ghost, *and hath had peace?* Job ix. 4.—The truth of which sentence millions of faithless souls have unhappily experienced to their cost. In effect, is it possible wilfully to resist grace, and not know, that we are displeasing God, and grieving the heart of the Holy Ghost? and with this intimate knowledge and persuasion in our breast, can we fail of being disquieted and uneasy? Can we fail of feeling the sting of our own inordinate affections? Can we wilfully stray from the paths of justice, and expect, that justice and peace, which delight in each

other's mutual embraces, shall meet within our own heart to impart, according to the scripture language, the friendly kiss to one another?

Ah! I have had but too fatal an experience of the consequences of such infidelity. When in so many occasions I have found myself deprived of peace, and thrown into trouble and uneasiness, to what ought I to have attributed my disquiet, but to my own unfaithfulness to God, and resistance to his grace? Yes, the voice of his grace called aloud within me: thou art displeasing thy God, thou art flying from his sacred presence, thou art grieving his divine spirit; the punishment of thy infidelity shall be the loss of thy peace, and of the tranquillity of thy conscience.

Sometimes I said to myself, in the bitterness of my affliction: *Why art thou sad, O my soul; and why dost thou trouble me?* Psalm lii. 6.—Ought I not to have understood, that I carried the cause of my uneasiness within myself, and my resistance to grace was the fatal source of my trouble? Yes, if I oppose the divine lights, darkness, disquiet and uneasiness must immediately follow my resistance, and the instant that shall see me unfaithful to God, must necessarily see me unhappy. But as I desire above all things, O my God, to preserve the peace of my soul, I will carefully avoid every infidelity and resistance to your pleasure for the future. No more will I expose myself to the cruel agitations of mind and heart, which are justly entailed on such trespasses: no more will I make you look down upon me with sourness and displeasure; no more will I incur a kind of anticipated purgatory or hell, by exposing myself to the dreadful alarms and uneasiness of conscience, which follow from unfaithfulness and opposition to your grace.

The third means to obtain and preserve peace is to mortify our senses and passions. If thou desirest, O my soul, to keep peace with God, declare war against thyself; every passion will necessarily be an enemy to thy rest, inasmuch as it disturbs and overturns the orders of his Providence. No: God and his holy peace cannot dwell in us, if our passions be not vanquished

and thoroughly subjected to his commands. He will only rule as a sovereign uncontrolled; every thing must be submissive to his pleasure; his kingdom is not established but in peace: a single passion introduces trouble and disorder into the soul, and consequently makes it an unfit dwelling for him.

Thou saidst, O adorable Saviour, that thou camest *not to send peace upon earth, but a sword;* Matt. x. 34. —which words indicate, that to obtain true peace we must take up arms against ourselves; that we must unsheath the sword of mortification; that we must constantly fight against our passions and perverse inclinations; for only by a thousand combats, and an uninterrupted war against ourselves can victory and peace be obtained. We must subdue and destroy our enemies, otherwise they will always rise to oppose our peace, and at length reduce us to a shameful bondage under their tyrannical government.

How carefully, therefore, must I undertake and carry on this warfare, if I desire to keep peace in my soul, which alone can make me happy? Assist me, O God of peace, to fight these battles against myself; strengthen me in the conflicts against my passions, which are so difficult to nature, and yet so necessary for the peace of my soul. I seek this peace with a view of my own happiness: I also desire it for your glory, since I cannot forfeit it without displeasing and offending you.

The fourth and most effectual means to acquire and preserve peace of soul, is a thorough and absolute conformity of our will to the will of God, and a total and unlimited abandoning of ourselves to his providence. We must cast ourselves into his arms, like children into the bosom of their parents, leaving to him the absolute disposal of our lot, depositing all our concerns in his hands, and abandoning ourselves wholly to his directions, so as not to allow ourselves any thought or uneasy reflection upon all the events of life. In this happy state what can disturb the peace of a soul, which wills whatsoever God wills or permits; which in all things regards only the disposition of his providence; which raising its thoughts and

affections to heaven, adores in all things him, who sovereignly disposes of all?

How secure and infallible is this means of acquiring peace? how speedily would a soul, which walks in these paths, enter into the road of peace? how quickly would it advance in it? how holily and happily would it live? What serene and peaceful days would it ever enjoy?

O my soul, thou hast deprived thyself of this happiness by refusing to walk in the paths of holy conformity. Ah! *if thou hadst known*, as our Saviour said, *the things, that are for thy peace*, (Luke xix. 42.) the graces and blessings, which would have followed from conforming thyself entirely to the divine will, what peace wouldst thou have felt, and what merits wouldst thou have acquired? But, blinded by the clouds of passion, and led astray by the treacherous allurement of this earth, thou hast mistaken the road of thy happiness, thou hast wandered from the paths of peace, and in running after deceitful and fleeting happiness, thou hast deprived thyself of true and solid comfort: which *are now hidden from thine eyes.* Luke xix. 42.

O my God, I see my error, and I bewail it. Madman, as I was, I sought for and desired peace; I said, *peace, peace*, and peace withdrew itself from my embraces, because I withdrew myself from its wise counsels: *Peace, peace, and there was no peace.* Jer. vi. 14.

But why do I thus run astray? If I am persuaded, that you are my Father, that you seek my good, that you know what is suitable for me, what have I else to do, O my God, than to rest in peace in the bosom of your providence, like a babe on the lap of its mother? Thus I should be holy, and thus I should be happy.

Conclude, from the foregoing considerations: 1st. Often and earnestly to entreat God to give you the blessing of peace; there is nothing, but what is granted to humble and ardent prayer.

2dly. To avoid carefully whatsoever can destroy peace in your soul, as sin, unfaithfulness to God, and resistance to his grace.

3dly. Cautiously to clear up all doubts of conscience, which can disturb the peace of your heart; they being

as a gnawing worm, or corroding poison, which necessarily eat it away.

4thly. When you shall be under trouble and affliction, to offer up your sufferings to God in atonement for your sins, believing that you are undeserving to relish the sweets of peace, after so great resistance to his pleasure.

5thly. To approach frequently to the sacraments, in order to purify your soul, and reestablish its calm, and to draw from those mountains of peace *water springing up into everlasting life.*

6thly. To entreat God in a particular manner for peace of soul in those last critical moments, which must decide your eternity, to the end, that you may receive the fruit of that comfortable prayer, which the church shall offer up for you after death: *may he rest in peace.*

THE COLLOQUY.

Merciful God, I desire more than ever to enjoy peace of soul, in preference to all the blessings of this earth, it being truly the only desirable blessing I can enjoy. If I ever entreated you with earnestness and sincerity to grant me any favour, it is the grace of peace, which I petition this day. Let others ask for the pleasures and comforts of this life, my wishes wholly centre in this one object. Grant it me according to your great mercy, and according to the earnest desire of my heart. I ask it not of the world, because the world cannot give it; you know, my God, that this precious fruit grows not on that evil ground. As to myself, I carry about me principles wholly contrary to and destructive of this peace: my passions, my perverse inclinations, my unhappy propensities, my whole nature fights against it; you therefore alone can grant it me, and secure me the possession of it. I ask it of you through your own ineffable goodness, and by that *peace to men of good will,* which you announced at your entrance into the world; by that peace, which reigns in heaven, and more particularly by that unutterable peace, which reigns within your own breast. Through your grace, which I regard as the source of all my good,

and particularly of this great blessing of peace, I firmly resolve to remove carefully every obstacle, that can be destructive of it.

FIFTEENTH LESSON.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength.—Deut. vi. 6.

Ye men, come forth from the hand of God, and created to his image and likeness, behold here the great and inviolable commandment, which the author of your being imposes upon you, to lead you to the term of your happiness. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength.* A father will be loved as a father; a friend will be loved as a friend; a king will be loved as a king; and God will be loved as God; that is, we must love him in all things, in preference to all things, above all things. The love, which we bear a thing, ought to be proportioned to the degree of its excellence; if its value is inconsiderable, our love should be slight and inconsiderable; if great, our love should be warm and ardent; if the thing is of immense and infinite value, our love, if possible, ought to be immense and infinite, like itself. Now God being infinitely good, and raised in excellence above all other things, the love which we bear him ought to exceed all other love. We must love God above all things, *viz.* more than our goods, because they are earthly; more than our friends, because they are mortal; more than ourselves, because all, that we are, and have, belongs to him. This is that love of preference so much recommended, and celebrated by the holy Fathers, but never sufficiently considered, and never sufficiently practised by us.

But more particularly, in what does this perfect love consist? It is a sovereign esteem of God, which gives him the first place of our heart, and an inviolable attachment to his holy law, which makes us prefer his friendship to every thing, that can stand in competition with it. If we were to behold the love of God suspend-

ed in one scale of a balance, and in the other thrones, crowns, sceptres, all possible created goods and pleasures, we should not hesitate a moment, but readily renounce every thing for the preservation of grace, and choose to forego the eternal possession of a thousand worlds, rather than be deprived one instant of the friendship of God. It is a steady affection, which makes us ready to engage in any difficulties, to sacrifice and suffer any thing rather than offend God and trespass against his love; torments, afflictions, tyrants and death itself, presented even in the most hideous shapes, are unable to shake it.

Such is the love of preference, which the law of God demands of us, and to which all other species of divine love are subordinate; as a love of complacency, which rejoices in seeing God possessed of his own essential and unchangeable perfections, his glory, his grandeur, his power, his felicity, &c.

A love of benevolence, which wishes God all the honour, that can be given him, desires to see him adored, loved, and served by all his creatures, honoured and worshipped by the hearts and by the actions of all men.

A love of gratitude, which blesses and returns God thanks for the favours bestowed by his bounty on Christian souls. A penitential love, which weeps for not having duly loved God, or for having offended him; all which are so many branches of divine love sprouting from the same root, so many rivulets which spring from the same source; that is, they are so many acts of the love of God, eminently contained in the love of preference, which is the great object of the divine commandment, that orders us to honour and love God above all things.

But is this love, so sublime and perfect in its nature, possible to weak and imperfect men in this world? In heaven, where we shall see God face to face, and where nothing will divide the affections of our hearts, we shall effectually love him without division; but in this place of banishment, exposed as we are to so many distracting objects, assaulted by so many dangerous temptations,

tyrannized over by so many passions, how is it possible to love God in this perfect manner?

We may consider the love of God either as to its essence, or its perfection. The perfection of the love of God consists in a constant actual attention to his presence, and in a lively and unrelenting ardour for his glory and interest at all times, such as the blessed always have in heaven. In this sense charity cannot be perfect in this world. Divided between so many different duties and employments in this life, our mind cannot constantly be united to God by an actual and affectionate fervour at all times; but the essence of the commandment of loving God, consisting in giving God the preference in all things, and in being ready at all times to renounce every thing rather than the grace and friendship of God, in this sense it is not only possible, but is reduced to practice every day, by many just and holy men: even millions of martyrs have signed the commandment with their blood.

It seems, O my God, that I am willing and desirous to love you, but however conducive this love would be to my happiness, I feel it not in myself. I experience a coldness and insensibility, at which I am justly alarmed. When I approach your throne, I am as one without affections, senseless and indifferent, having nothing to utter to you, and feeling no interest in your presence: I fear therefore, that I do not love you.

To appease our alarms, let us distinguish the sensible and feeling love of God from the solid love of pure faith. In some moments of spiritual sweetness and consolation we experience a sensible love of God; our heart is warmed with an ardent fervour, and we are carried with pleasing transports towards God; but as this love does not depend on us, so it is not commanded. We may love God without feeling this sensible affection, which many of the saints never experienced. Let us be contented with the solid love; let us be ready to give up every thing, and suffer every hardship, yea death itself, rather than offend God. This will suffice; the rest we must leave to his unmeasurable goodness.

Another question is, whether by the commandment of loving God we are forbidden to love any thing besides himself. No; God does not pretend to stifle all feeling in our heart, and reduce us to a state of utter insensibility, which he even condemns both by the voice of nature and reason. He forbids us loving any thing but himself with an independent love terminated immediately in the created object without a reference to himself; but he allows us to love other things with a subordinate and dependent love, which has himself for its final end. Thus parents love their children; wives and husbands love one another; friends love their friends; but they love all in God and for God, and always less than God, which in reality is loving God in them. The love of God, says St. Augustin, resembles a great river, flowing over a vast plain; the small rivulets fall into it, and endow it with their tributary waters. This great river is the love of God, which flows into our hearts; all other well-ordered loves are so many different rivulets, wich like vassals coming to join it, offer their homage to divine love; and this immediately unites them all in the immense ocean of the adorable perfections of the divine Being. Thus we love God in all, and all in God.

But by what tokens can it be known, that a soul loves God? I should wish, O my God, to love you, and to be able moreover to bear witness to myself, that I love you.

Beware, Christian soul, of attempting to sound the fathomless abyss. There is no certain mark to be given in this world of thy loving God; *man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred:* Eccl. ix. 1.—that is a secret, which God has reserved wholly to himself. Nevertheless, to gratify thy weakness, or thy eagerness at least in part, I will assign some marks, by which thou mayest be able in a certain degree to form a judgment of thyself.

1st. Dost thou sincerely and ardently desire to love God? If so, be not disheartened; an ardent desire of a thing is not at a great distance from the possession of it, when to possess it, it is sufficient to desire it. 2dly. Dost thou think of God and of divine things with pleasure? Dost thou find a comfort in hearing

God spoken of, and in calling him to thy remembrance? If that be thy case, it should be a subject of great consolation to thee. If thou frequently thoughtest of the world and its vanities with complacency and satisfaction, thou wouldst have just reason to fear. 3dly. Hast thou a great horror of sin? Dost thou regard it, as the greatest of evils? If so, trust that thou *hast some fear of God*, as there is hardly a greater mark of loving God, than a fear of not loving him. 4thly. Dost thou observe his commandments, and endeavour to fulfil his holy law? Christ says, *if any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him:* John xiv. 23.—which words ought to banish all anxious apprehensions from thy breast. After all, what thou art interested in, is to love God, and not to know, that thou lovest him. If thou wert assured of it, what wouldst thou then do? Do the same now, and thou wilt be certain of loving him. The practice of good is preferable to the knowledge of that practise, which perhaps would only flatter thy pride and self-love, and bereave thee of the treasure of grace, when thou thinkest thyself most secure of possessing it.

How happy should we be, if uniting all these great objects in one point of view, we could avail ourselves of them to form at present in our hearts a perfect act of divine love, and to understand the dignity, and excellency of that act? Let us endeavour to consider the nature and prerogatives of it, such as the grace of God shall represent them to us.

An act of the love of God is the most holy action that man can perform in life. It is the most heroical and virtuous disposition of a Christian soul, and the sublimest exercise of religion: it is the greatest homage, that we can offer to God, and places us the highest upon a level with the heavenly spirits, by giving us admittance into the heart of God himself, and raising us already in some manner to a participation of the joys of the blessed, whilst we are still inhabitants of the earth.

A perfect act of the love of God comprises in itself the fruit of all graces, and the merit of all virtues; yet so great is its power and efficacy, that it is itself alone

capable of blotting out the malice of sin. If we had the misfortune of having plunged ourselves in the greatest crimes and excesses, and should make an act of perfect love of God together with a desire of confessing our sins, they would be at that same instant remitted; and even the efficacy of the act of divine love might be so great, as to satisfy for the whole penalty due to our crimes, so that, if we died that moment, our soul would be admitted to the immediate enjoyment of the presence of its heavenly spouse.

Christians, love then the Lord, and live no longer in this world but to love him, and to fit ourselves to love him for eternity. On what do you prostitute the affections of your hearts? On fleeting and perishable objects, which cannot delight beyond the moment. They amuse or they distract you at present, but they never afford complete satisfaction. Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, love him, whilst you are in health; love him, when illness shall bring you to the confines of eternity; and may your last breath be drawn only to assure him of your most ardent love.

MEDITATION. ON DIVINE LOVE.

PROSTRATE in your sacred presence, O my God, and in that of your holy Angels, I come to petition of you the greatest favour you can bestow on me, *viz.* the perfecting of your divine love in my soul. I am sensible, that I came not into this world for any thing else, and that I ought always to have loved you; but how unhappy have I been to prostitute the affections of my heart upon other things, and to mispend the days which you allotted me to love you? I bewail my misfortune, and entreat you to create in me at this moment a perfect love, such as shall admit of no limits and reservation, and such as shall indemnify me at least in part for the loss I have sustained in not loving you heretofore, as I ought to have done.

1st. Our love of God must be lively and ardent. That fire is nearly being extinguished, which is faint and languid. We must love God not only in all things,

but in preference to and above all. All our powers ought to be animated and inflamed with an ardent love of him; our understanding should glow in the contemplation of his perfections; our heart should be warm in its affections to him. Our tongues should be eloquent in rehearsing his bounties; our efforts unrelenting in promoting his interest. All our thoughts and wishes ought to be the thoughts and wishes of an ardent lover. O my God, may I love thus; may I live for nothing else in this world; may this love be the support and nourishment of my soul: happy he, who loves in this manner, and lives no longer but by the heat and vigour of his love.

2dly. Our love of God must be generous: ready to make the greatest sacrifices, and engage in the most difficult enterprises for the sake of its beloved. Divine love does not spare its victims; it leads them forth to Calvary, and there presenting them with the bitter chalice, inures them to suffering. They are prepared for sacrifices by the hands of their beloved; but his enchanting touch changes all their sufferings into pleasure and delight, and they find more solid comfort in being with him at the foot of his cross upon Calvary, than they would in sharing of his glory upon Thabor. True generous lovers know what they owe to their beloved, and know the benefit that accrues to themselves from suffering. Whilst others take the alarm, and fly from their suffering God, abandoning him to suffer and die by himself, these stick close to him in the midst of his torments, and look up to it as their greatest happiness and glory to suffer and die together with him. May I imitate their generosity, and not remain like the greatest part of men, ignorant even of the very name of that noble virtue.

3dly. Our love of God must be effectual, showing itself by works. To love God is not barely to say, that we love him; nor alone to desire to love him; nor yet purely to experience some sensible feelings of love in our hearts. The love of God, when genuine, makes us die to ourselves, renounce the world and all things in t, not only in mind and heart, but in effect,

when God demands it from us. The love of God makes us observe his commandments, resign ourselves to his will, submit implicitly to the orders of his providence, bear patiently all sufferings and trials coming from his hand. The love of God teaches us to conquer our passions, to restrain our natural inclinations, to surmount all hardships and difficulties, to die to ourselves and all things. This is effectual love; all the rest, whether saying or fancying that we love, without works, is only a phantom and illusion, not the reality of love; which declares itself by works, and not in words only: sacrifices and self-denials are the language of true love.

It was in this manner that the Saints loved. Love transported the Apostles to the extremities of the earth; love made the holy Confessors enter joyfully into their dungeons; love drove the Martyrs to the scaffold; love made the Virgins *wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb;* Rev. vii. 1. —love peopled the desert with penitential anchorets. Such as these may truly say, that they loved you; but for me, O my God, ought I not to blush when I say, I love you, whilst my actions are either silent or give my words the lie? Grant me an effectual love, and my heart shall utter it to you, and you shall hear its voice.

4thly. Our love of God must be pure and disinterested. We must love God for his own sake alone, because he is good, perfect, and infinitely amiable in himself, that is, because he is God. We must neither love, nor be pleased with any thing equally as with God; neither esteem nor be enamoured with his gifts, his comforts, his rewards, as much as with his own intrinsic goodness, his beauty, his greatness, his infinite perfections. The reward, which love seeks for, is daily to be more endeared to its beloved. Be far from us those narrow and mercenary hearts, which are always seeking themselves; they know not what love is; they often dishonour and profane the name of love. Disclose thyself to us, O supreme Goodness, and sovereign beauty, and thy splendour will make all other objects disappear, as the presence of the sun banishes

the stars from our sight. Thou alone, my God, be ever praised and honoured; be thou the sovereign Ruler of all hearts. If a God suffice not for us, what can suffice?

5thly. Our love of God must be constant and steady. Sometimes a small spark of divine love seems to light up in our heart, but it presently dwindles away to nothing. There are moments, wherein being touched by the grace of the Holy Ghost, it appears that we can tell God that we love him; but shortly our fervour relents, and we find no longer the dispositions of love, which prevailed the moment before. One day we are enchanted with love, another we are indifferent to its feelings; one day we sigh for the presence of our beloved, another we easily lose sight of him; one day our heart breathes nothing but transports of affection, another we even remember not that we had loved. Whence, O my God, is this tepidity and indifference? Whence these changes and vicissitudes? Art not thou always amiable, or is there any day, on which we are not bound to love thee? O Beauty always ancient, and ever new, canst thou lose any portion of thy charms, or can thy attractives, if attended to, ever fail of exciting new love? What have we found in thee to disgust us, or what have we discovered out of thee to draw our affections elsewhere.

Grant me, O my God, one thing, *viz.* that I may love thee with a pure and holy, a constant and steady love. *One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after.* Psalm xxvi. 4.—I ask not for health, for length of days, or for any perishable good; my sole petition is to obtain divine love, which I do not indeed deserve; and of which I know I have positively rendered myself undeserving, by prostituting the affections of my heart upon profane things. But however unworthy I am, thou deservest and demandest this love of me, and I desire it. I am still capable of having the sacred flame kindled in my breast; I still live, and through thy grace I can yet say from my heart, my God, I love thee. May the expression be sincere: perhaps it will be for the first time in my life; but I will continue to repeat it as long as I shall have breath,

Conclude by resolving: 1st. To accustom yourself by the frequent exercises of acts of divine love; they ought to be as frequent as the drawing of your breath. 2dly. To propose to yourself, as far as possible, the motive of love in all your actions, it being the most holy and perfect motive, from which you can act. 3dly. To engage others to the utmost of your ability whensoever occasion offers, to the practice of divine love. 4thly. To unite your exercises of love with those of the saints in heaven, who are continually employed in that exercise.

THE COLLOQUY.

O my God, I love thee, and I desire to love thee with my whole heart, and with my whole soul, and with my whole strength. I love thee, O sovereign beauty and goodness, and wish that I could repair at this moment by the ardour of my love the time hitherto lost in not loving thee, and atone for those unhappy days, in which I was so unfortunate as to offend thee. Why were not all the days of my life devoted to thy love? I then should have lived; but now life has been of no avail to me.

I love thee, my God, and not contented with loving thee myself alone, I wish I could induce all men to pay the homage of their tenderest affections to thee. I wish it were allowed me to run through the world and exhort all men to honour and worship thee, and to enter into a general confederacy of loving and adoring thee with all the powers and feelings of their hearts. How happy would they be? How fortunate would it be for the world to be set on fire with and consumed by this divine flame, and how glorious and beautiful would be the *new earth*, which *we look for according to promise*, (2 Peter iii. 13.) if it rose from the ashes of this heavenly conflagration. Thou camest, O Lord, *to send fire upon earth, and* what will'st thou, *but that it be kindled?* Luke vii. 49.—Light it up in the hearts of all men, and may it be here only to blaze and glow with great brilliancy and ardour during the whole length of eternity. At least, my God, I desire to love thee: this is my declaration; make it sincere by filling my heart

with thy love, which I pray, may live and reign in it for ever and ever

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SIXTEENTH LESSON.

ON THE JOYS OF PARADISE.

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for them, that love him.—1 Cor. ii. 9.

God created man to be happy, and it is in heaven that he has prepared the seat of his happiness. He leaves him for awhile upon earth, as in a state of trial, intending only to grant him happiness in reward of his obedience to the divine commands: after which the soul, which came forth from the hands of God, must return to the author of its being, to be eternally united to him; in which its happiness will consist.

We shall then *see God, we shall love him, and we shall possess him;** which is the idea that Saint Augustin gives us of heaven. But we shall see him unveiled, we shall love him without dividing the affections of our heart upon any other object, we shall possess him without fear of losing him.

1st. We shall see God, and in seeing him what ineffable wonders shall we discover? We shall behold unveiled those great mysteries, which during life exercised our faith, whilst they were covered over with the impenetrable darkness of divine revelation; an adorable Trinity of Persons is an Unity of Essence, a God-made man, and clothed with our frail humanity, a God-man hidden under the veil of the sacramental species with so many other secret truths heretofore incomprehensible to human understanding. All will then be cleared up, and from the obscurity of faith, we shall pass to the splendor of a blissful and intuitive vision.

We shall see God, and in seeing him we shall admire the effusions of his infinite goodness towards us during the time of our life, and particularly in the moments when we had unhappily strayed from him by sin. We shall be astonished at so many distin-

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* Videbimus, amabimus, possidebimus.—*Aug.*

guished marks of his mercy in calling us back from our wanderings, in eagerly pursuing us in our flight from him, and patiently waiting our return, whilst we delay the day of our conversion. We shall admire his tenderness in receiving us on our repentance; and his care and attention in keeping us in the paths of virtue afterwards. We shall view with surprise the many dangers and misfortunes, from which his watchful providence preserved us: we shall see, that we were a thousand times on the brink of ruin and were only saved by his hand; that we were falling down the dreadful precipice, and should have been eternally lost, if his mercy alone had not kept us from perishing. O infinite goodness, how can we merit these favours?

We shall see God, and in seeing him we shall discover the hitherto impenetrable springs of providence in the government of mankind; by what wonderful ways God conducted his faithful servants to the term of their happiness; why and in what manner some among men were enlightened with the true faith, whilst others are abandoned and remain plunged in the darkness of their errors and infidelity. These and other unsearchable mysteries will then be unravelled: the great day of eternity will disclose all to us: doubts will be dispersed, and providence will justify by withdrawing the veil that hides at present its unerring wisdom and justice from our sight.

We shall see God, and in seeing him we shall contemplate and adore at leisure his amiable perfections, his sacred attributes, that enchanting beauty, which will ever charm our eyes without tiring, and satiate our hearts without cloying them; that supreme goodness, which always displays new attractives, and pours forth new delights on its admiring beholders; that Sovereign Wisdom infinitely enlightened in its views, infinitely certain in its projects, infinitely impenetrable in its decrees, which in the government of the world has known how to choose in so divine a manner means proportioned to their end, and to conduct all things sweetly and strongly to their proper term; that illimited Power, which drew the universe out of nothing;

which poised the earth and the air, which fixed the unsurmountable boundaries of the waves of the sea, and which nevertheless in all things visible has only given us a faint essay of its immeasurable strength. It is in heaven, and in favour of its elect, that it reserves to itself to display its wonders; there will appear the power of the Arm of God, and there his elect will know the wonders of his works.

We shall see God, and we shall see him face to face without cover and disguise, such as he is in himself. At present, in this place of banishment, we only see God in his works, we contemplate him in his images through the obscurity of faith in a very imperfect manner. We shall then behold him in himself, we shall view his own divine essence by the splendour of that heavenly light, with which our souls will be environed in bliss. My God, what rays of glory will encompass us, when we are rescued from the darkness of the present night, and what beauties shall we discover in thy own sacred nature during the long day of a happy eternity?

2dly. *We shall see God, and we shall love him.* Can the eye behold the sovereign good, the source of all good, and the heart not be enchanted with it.

Yes, we shall love God, and love him with our whole heart: all our affections will tend to him with the utmost impetuosity. The stone, which hurries to its centre; the fire, which launches towards its sphere, the arrow, which is driven from the bow, but faintly represent the ardour and steadiness with which a loving heart shall be carried towards the supreme object of its love. It will love God, and love nothing but God, it will admit of no division in its affections; it will tend solely to God; or if other things can be loved, they will be loved for him alone. As God was the object of all its wishes, so the enjoyment of him now will be fulfilling of all its desires.

We shall love God, and love him in a manner worthy of himself, imitating the love, with which he loves his own eternal being. We love him in this world, it is true, but alas, in how imperfect a manner?

The subject of our love is often that of our sorrow; our soul then will take its flight, and launch swiftly towards its beloved, loving God with all the powers, which it has to love.

We shall love God, and we shall be secure of loving him for ever. In this world we wish to love God; but being uncertain, whether we love him or not, we are necessarily alarmed at this uncertainty; and love, which ought to be our comfort, on that account becomes in some manner our torment. Then we shall be secure of our dispositions; we shall love God, and we shall be certain of loving him always: our love of him will be unchangeable, and our desire of loving him no other than to be immersed more and more in the abyss of love.

We shall love God, and we shall join in company with all the saints to love him, as it were by common consent, mutually congratulating with one another for the happiness we enjoy in loving him, and constantly animating and encouraging one another to his holy love; like many fires, which being joined together serve to increase the common heat. O sacred flame, be thou kindled in our hearts at present, that thou mayest glow in us during the whole length of eternity.

3dly. We shall see God, we shall love and we shall possess him. The sight of God will create love, and love will give enjoyment, which is the term and fulfilling of our happiness.

We shall possess God, and in him all goods, riches and treasures; all honours and splendour, all pleasures and all delight. We shall not only have whatever we can desire, but even what must prevent a possibility of desiring more; however eager our desires may be, they will be satisfied beyond the extent of desire itself. We shall then experience, by the full possession of all things, the truth of that sentence of the Prophet: *I shall be satisfied, when thy glory shall appear.* Psalm xvi. 15.

Yes, in heaven, all goods, pleasures and riches will flow at once into the same heart, to endow it with all the comfort and satisfaction, that the heart is capable of receiving.

We shall possess God, and in him all kind of good without the mixture of any evil. In this world pleasure is always mingled with bitterness; our joy is never pure; never is there comfort without some tincture of uneasiness. It will not be so in heaven. Neither trouble nor pain, nor irksomeness, nor fright, nor any other evil shall there disturb the peace and enjoyment of those, who are admitted to the possession of God. *Death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more.* Rev. xxi. 4.

We shall possess God, and in him all goods, without the fear of ever losing them. Who can comprehend the degree of happiness, that will be added to our glory from the certainty of enjoying this immense bliss in all its fulness for a never ending eternity? As long as heaven shall subsist, and it shall subsist for ever; as long as God shall be God, and he shall always be what he is; beyond ages and millions of years the elect shall always be with God, and in God shall enjoy all treasures, greatness, and felicity. The eternity of their bliss shall be beginning every instant, and each instant they shall relish the pleasure of a whole eternity. Their happiness, which is grounded and established on the eternity and unchangeableness of God himself, will know no end. It will be in their regard, as it is in regard to God himself: *Of his kingdom there shall be no end.* O supreme felicity, man is not capable of conceiving thee, and yet he is made to possess thee

MEDITATION. On the same subject.

Let us consider, 1st, What we do to purchase heaven: 2dly, What will be the feelings of a soul, when it enters into the mansions of bliss. You placed us on earth, O my God, for no other intent than to deserve heaven; all the days of our life ought to be employed in preparing ourselves for it. Raise our understandings to comprehend the ineffable joys of that blissful abode, and inflame our hearts with an earnest desire of being at length admitted into it.

1st Point. We are created for an immense, and unspeakable and eternal happiness; but being destined

to so great an end, why are we so backward in endeavouring to attain it? Our thoughts and affections are chiefly bent on created things: our daily care and employ is about this perishable world; the pleasures and goods of the earth engage our attention, and life fleets away in running after these empty illusions and vanities, whilst the great objects of eternity are utterly neglected by us. Alas! how can we thus mistake our destiny, or rather voluntarily slight it? has heaven no charms to attract us, or has earth alone power to captivate our affections? Blinded men! Let us desire less, and let us desire more; less of the false and seducing things of this earth, but more of the true and solid goods of heaven, which alone can make us happy.

I ought to ask myself the question: what have I done to deserve heaven? Being destined to share the happiness of God myself, have I laboured to render myself worthy of it? What care and pains, what efforts have I devoted to that purpose? Where are the virtues I have practised? Where the victories I have gained over myself? Where the sacrifices I have made to procure myself this supreme bliss?

But on the other hand I ought to ask, what God has done and suffered to merit heaven for me, and to engage me to deserve it? What do his tears, his blood, his torments, his death declare, and what language do they utter to my soul? They inform me of the true price of heaven. I ought to ask the question; what have the saints done and suffered to make themselves deserving of the glorious crown? Their piety and devotion, their penitential exercises, their flight and retirement from a seducing world, their sufferings on the scaffold, or at the flaming stake, show me what heaven is worth, and to what the prospect of so great a reward ought to encourage me. Did they expect any other heaven? had they any other hopes, than I have? Am I not created for the same end, and destined to the same happiness, which they had in view?—What have I done to deserve it?

But I ought still to ask a further question: What do worldlings do for the frail and perishable goods of

this earth? they spend and wear themselves out with watching, fatigue and labour; no cares and hardships are refused in purchasing a temporal convenience, or raising the edifice of an unsteady fortune, that shall last but a few days, even in the midst of troubles and danger. Nothing stops, nothing disheartens them in the pursuit of temporal goods. And after what do they run? For what do they labour? *They run indeed*, as the Apostle says, *that they may receive a corruptible crown*, (1 Cor. ix. 25.) which they are even uncertain of obtaining, since though all enter the race, many run in vain. Yet they leave no stone unturned to purchase their false and deceitful goods; and we have *an incorruptible* crown set before us, being destined to the enjoyment of supreme and everlasting goods, neglect to secure the possession of them to ourselves. How long shall *the children of this world be wiser in their generation, than the children of light?* Luke xvi. 8.—Alas! where is my faith?

What then have I to do upon earth; knowing the supreme happiness, to which I am destined, unless it be to render myself deserving of it? Why am I still amongst the living, unless it be to prepare for immortality? The world and all things in it shall one day end: God has created *new heavens and a new earth* (Rom. viii. 17.) to be the dwelling of his Elect for ever: *here we have no lasting city; but we seek one to come.* I must therefore ever look upon myself in this world as a banished man sighing after his heavenly country.

2d Point. Let us consider the excess of joy, with which a soul will be transported at the moment of its entering into bliss. I am then at length secure of my happiness, it will say to itself; I am arrived at my long wished for term; I am settled eternally in the possession of all good. I am admitted to the full enjoyment of God; and I shall live and reign in his presence, in company with his elect for ever. The days of sorrow and darkness are now past; it was necessary to suffer, lament and do violence to myself for some years; but these conflicts opened the road to my present happiness; and to the superabundant

rewards I now receive. Merciful God, how pleasing is it to be with thee? How comfortable to be secure of never being deprived of thy sacred presence? The thoughts of this security alone indemnifies me for all my past troubles; and I now joyfully experience the truth of that sentence of the Apostle; *that the sufferings of time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall* continue to *be revealed* in me for ever.

O blessed Sion, shall I have the happiness of being admitted one day into thy joyful abode? Will my lot be for ever with the elect in the heavenly Jerusalem? Ah! if I am so happy, with what eye shall I then look down upon the vanities and illusions of the present time? How shall I congratulate myself for having been faithful to the law of my God, and bless the sufferings I have undergone in his service? How comfortable will it be to have quitted *the broad way, that leadeth to destruction*, and to have entered *the narrow gate, and straight way, that leadeth to life?* Matt. vii. 13, 14.—How pleasing to be associated with the friends of God, and to sing the canticle of his praises in concert with the Blessed Spirits who attend his throne, for ever? O my soul, let us aspire now to these heavenly delights; let us mount in thought to the regions of bliss, and from the consideration of heavenly glory let us draw the most solid and advantageous reflections for the regulation of our future conduct in order to purchase eternal life.

Let us resolve: 1st. To regard all the goods of this life, as a mere cipher and nothing, when compared to those of eternity. The deceitful pleasures, and riches of this world can only entail real evils; those of heaven will make us completely rich and happy. 2dly. To regard sufferings and afflictions as a real favour and blessing sent us by God, in as much as they will soon end, and purchase us an eternal recompense. How many saints owe their salvation to sufferings, and without crosses would have been eternally miserable? 3dly. To make use of the thought of eternity as a motive to resist temptations and repress our passions: the moment we yield

we may be taken out of life, and one fatal instant of forbidden pleasure may deprive us of an eternity of happiness. 4th. To propose the joys of heaven to ourselves as a means of softening the rigours of death. Can we fear a momentary suffering in order to purchase an eternal crown? We must quit our place of residence to arrive at our heavenly country. Whilst here we are only in danger of offending God; if we joyfully give up life in obedience to his commands, we may hope for happiness in return.

THE COLLOQUY.

O my God, I will ever keep in view the happiness to which thou hast destined me. Thou madest me for heaven; thou createdst my soul to enjoy thyself; too long has it run after the perishable things of this world; may it tend from this day solely to thee, and may the consideration of its great destiny prevent it from ever rendering itself unworthy of the happiness, to which thou callest it.

O Blessed Sion, O holy City of God, may the day quickly come, on which I shall be introduced into thy happy mansions? I say with the Prophet, *When shall I come and appear before the face of God?* Ps. xli. 3.—Till that happy moment arrives, days are to me as years, years have length of ages, life is burdensome to me. Yes, I only live through that pleasing hope; my only comfort and joy is from the happy tidings, that are given me of the house of the Lord, where I hope to reign with him for ever: *I rejoiced at the things, that were said to me; we shall go into the house of the Lord.* Ps. cxxi. 1.

SEVENTEENTH LESSON.

ON PERSEVERANCE.

He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved.—Matt. x. 22.

This lesson is addressed to those Christians, who having abandoned God by sin, have had the happiness to return to him by repentance; and the most powerful and effectual motive they can have to engage them in the service of God is the goodness itself of God, and the eternal acknowledgment, which they owe him for the signal favour of readmitting them to his friendship.

What therefore were these Christians heretofore? What are they at present? And what has God done in their behalf? They were in a state of sin and spiritual death, deprived of the friendship of God, objects of his wrath, and liable every instant to be plunged into the torments of hell, which their sins deserved. But in this woful condition, in which they only merited the effects of the severest vengeance of God, what did God do for them, and with what graces did he prevent them? He bountifully called them back in their flight; he waited for them with unalterable patience during their estrangement from him; he received them with unspeakable tenderness at their return. What graces and mercy did God hereby show them? Consequently what gratitude and love do they owe God? With what fidelity and constancy ought they to be attached to his service. With what exactness and punctuality ought this sole motive of gratitude to inspire them?

But if after such mercy and favours they should again abandon God, and rise in rebellion against him, should they not be looked upon as monsters of ingratitude, unworthy of the life they enjoy?

What are they at present? Their state resembles that of the prodigal son in the gospel, after his repentance and return to his father's house. Having been like to that undutiful youth in his follies and indiscretions, they should not only imitate him in his conversion and return to his father, but let the bounty and tenderness of their heavenly Father in admitting them again to the share of his affections, which they had forfeited by their sins, fill them with new love and affection for him, and bind them irrevocably to the faithful observance of his holy law ever afterwards. Had the prodigal, after the great and signal favours received from his father, relapsed into his former errors, and repaid his parent's goodness with baseness and ingratitude, how justly would he have deserved our utmost reprobation? Such will they be in the sight of God, if they again turn their backs on him, if they offend and exasperate him anew, that is, if they fail

of persevering in their duty to him. What monsters of ingratitude would they become, and what fatal consequences would their ingratitude entail upon them?

1st. By falling again into sin, relapsing sinners would deprive themselves of all the merits they had formerly acquired; they would lose the fruit of their labours and conflicts, and of the great pains they had taken to return to God. They would forfeit the grace and friendship of God, together with many of the super natural habits of virtue, which the Holy Ghost has bestowed upon them; and in lieu of the spiritual plenty and riches, which they before enjoyed, they would be reduced to a state of the greatest indigence and want, and only heap up treasures of wrath to themselves against the day of wrath. Such would be the dreadful consequences of falling again into sin.

2dly. By failing in perseverance they would throw themselves into a more deplorable situation, than they were in at first. *The last state of that man*, said our Saviour, *is made worse than the first.* Matt. xii. 45.—A relapse into sin is more grievous in the sight of God than the first transgression, in as much as it is committed with greater knowledge and deliberation, with greater malice and ingratitude, in opposition to more numerous and more signal graces, contrary to the most positive resolutions, and solemn promises made to God, and in despite of the blood itself of Jesus Christ, and of the holy sacrament, by which the sinner before had been reconciled to God.

3dly. By relapsing into sin they would render the work of their conversion still more difficult than it was at first. As a return of bodily illness is more dangerous and fatal, than the first attack, so the wounds of the soul, when renewed, become deeper and more inveterate. When their passions have gained new strength by being indulged, and their propensity to evil and sinful habits have taken deeper root, what essential hindrances must they find therein to their repentance? The greatest efforts, and most generous sacrifices can with difficulty work a conversion. But will they be capable of exerting such efforts, and of

making such sacrifices? If, when smaller obstacles stood in their way, they failed of becoming victorious, what prospect will they have of vanquishing, when the obstacles are unfortunately multiplied, and their own strength is considerably diminished?

4thly. If converted sinners wilfully trespass anew against the law of God, they would have just reason to fear, that he would withdraw his graces from them, at least his privileged and choice graces, with which they were heretofore prevented. Can a Father have the feeling tenderness and affection for his child, which nature inspires, if he sees himself cruelly outraged and offended by him? Will a Friend, when treated unworthily and dishonoured by his friend, make the first advance to a reconciliation? Will a King impart his choicest favours to an undutiful subject who is betraying him and rising in rebellion against him? God is their King, their Friend, and their Father. If they are so unhappy as to offend him again, after having been graciously reinstated in his friendship, can they expect to be favoured with his special, and most precious graces; or, on the contrary have they not reason to apprehend, that those graces will be withheld from them for fear of a new profanation and new abuse.

5thly. I must add, even with trembling, that sinners by want of persevering render their former repentance and conversion in some manner suspected. I readily indeed allow, that grace does not render them impeccable, that after a sincere conversion they may fall again, and that a relapse is not a certain mark of a false repentance. God forbid, that I should pretend to throw groundless fears and apprehensions into the hearts of Christians. Nevertheless it is always true to say, that relapses give some grounds to fear the sincerity of a former conversion, particularly when those relapses return soon, repeatedly, and with full deliberation. Now, if there is only the least suspicion in this regard, is not that alone sufficient to make them dread sovereignly a relapse into sin, and fix them in a determinate resolution of persevering, for fear of the fatal consequences that would follow from a neglect of it.

But a still further motive to strengthen converts in their desire and intention of persevering, is the consideration of the divine bounty in having saved them from eternal ruin. They ought to consider themselves as victims of the divine justice, which by an unexpected mercy had been spared in the very moment they were devoted to destruction. The man, who should hinder us from falling down a precipice, would unquestionably render us a much more signal service, than he, who should lift us up after our fall. Now this is what God has done to such sinners. By their sins they had merited hell; God by hindering them from falling into the place of punishment due to their crimes did them a greater favour, than if he had drawn them from thence, after they were plunged in it. Consequently what gratitude and acknowledgment do they owe God? How ardently ought they to love him? But how can they testify their love of him, unless it be by an inviolable fidelity, and constant perseverance in his service? What should we say of that man, who having been drawn from destruction, or prevented from falling into it, should rise from his danger only to insult his benefactor, and exasperate the person, who had saved him? Such would be the conduct of sinners, if being mercifully freed from sin by the grace of God, they should offend him anew, and turn his own bounties, with which he had prevented them, against himself.

If such motives find a heart capable of feeling, will they not infallibly engage it in the most determinate resolution of persevering for ever in the service of God, and of sacrificing life itself rather than depart from the fidelity and duty owing to him? After all we must remember, that it is not the beginning but the end, that will insure our happiness. *He, that shall persevere unto the end, shall be saved.* Matt. x. 22.

MEDITATION

ON THE MEANS OF PERSEVERING IN GOOD.

I AM sensible, O my sovereign Lord, and Benefactor, that all motives call upon me to persevere in your service. You have displayed your greatest mercy on

me, and in return I am desirous of nothing so much as to cleave inviolably to you. To that end I will use all means in my power to secure to myself the great gift of perseverance. Grant me your light and strength to form such plans and enter on such resolutions, as shall be most conducive towards the procuring of that blessing.

1st. The first means I will make use of to obtain the grace of perseverance, shall be prayer. Perseverance, O my God, is one of the most precious graces contained in your treasury, which no one can condignly merit, but all must pray for with earnestness and fervour. I will ask it therefore of you with all the ardour, of which I am capable, and I will continue to ask it all the days of my life. This grace can only be received from your bountiful hands; but you will grant it to my humble petition, particularly as you yourself command me to ask it of you, which is a certain mark, that you are more earnest in your desire to bestow this fervour, than I can be in my wishes to obtain it. I shall always consider this blessing as the greatest of graces, and most valuable treasure that can be possessed; it being the only thing, that can make me completely happy in time, and secure my happiness for eternity.

2dly. I will endeavour, by dint of the most solid reflections and serious meditation, to rivet myself in the firm resolution of persevering. I will often say to myself, are not the motives, which first engaged me in the service of God, or drew me back to it, when I had forsaken it, the same now, as when they formerly had that powerful influence on my mind? Is not the God, whom I serve, always equally great, equally good, equally holy and perfect, equally deserving of my homage and of my sincerest affections? Is not the gospel, which I profess to follow, always the same holy law, and same secure rule to enlighten and conduct me to my happiness? Are the great truths, which formerly affected me, now changed? Ought not the shades of death, which encompass me on all sides, and terrors of a dreadful judgment, whither I may be cited at any instant, an eternity of happiness or of

misery, to which I must one day come; I say, ought not these striking objects of futurity to be constantly fixed before my eyes to compel me to walk steadfastly in the paths of salvation? Such solid considerations will strengthen me in good, and arm me against the attacks of my weakness and inconstancy. *Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.* Ecclesiasticus vii. 49.

3dly. The third means shall be to keep a strict guard over my heart and senses, to subdue my passions and vicious inclinations, to watch all my steps and all the actions of my life, finally, to be particularly on my guard against the deceits and temptations of the devil, lest the angel of darkness transforming himself into an angel of light should find occasion of drawing me into illusion and sin. I am sensible, that every thing is to be feared from that subtle enemy of my salvation, and unless I pay a constant attention to myself, I must always necessarily be exposed to lose the grace of God, together with my soul. But a holy watchfulness, such as is so earnestly recommended to us by Jesus Christ, will keep my eyes open to the dangers that surround me, and thus, by favour of the divine light, I shall be enabled to escape the snares that are laid for my destruction. *Watch ye and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.* Matt. xxvi. 41.

4thly. The fourth means, which of all perhaps is the most indispensably necessary, shall be to avoid the occasions of sin. A fatal experience ought to have taught me how great my own weakness is. I am sensible indeed in some manner of it, and I see, that in spite of my strongest resolutions and purposes, if I expose myself anew to the occasion, the occasion will overthrow me; because on one hand the occasion will always present the same alluring objects, and on the other I shall always carry about me the same fund of natural weakness and misery. The same objects seldom fail of making the same impressions on the heart, and the same impressions but too usually bring on the same fatal consequences. Were we as wise as a Solomon, or as strong as a Samson, the occasion would still overturn us. If the strongest pillars have

been shaken, let us, weak and frail reeds, tremble for ourselves, and particularly on certain occasions let us be assured, that nothing but flight can rescue and secure us from danger. *He that loveth danger, shall perish in it.* Ecclesiasticus iii. 27.

5thly. The fifth means to secure the grace of perseverance, shall be to put myself above the opinions and censure of the world. How many weak souls have unfortunately perished through human respects! At certain times, when grace speaks to the heart, we seem to look upon the world with an eye of contempt, we say with the Apostle, in the height of our fervour, that neither contempt, nor railleries, nor persecutions, nor any creatures whatsoever conspiring against us, shall separate us from the Grace of God. But, alas! it is not necessary that the world should enter into a league against us, an insignificant word, a scoff, a mere trifle, are often sufficient to stop and overturn all our projects of virtue. Perverse world, how long by thy deluding terrors shalt thou shake the constancy of the children of God? Did not our Saviour say: *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his glory, and that of his Father?* Luke ix. 26.—The world is an enemy to Christ; ought I not to fear and mistrust it?

6thly. The sixth means shall be a frequent use of the holy sacraments. God has annexed such graces to those fountains of salvation, that it is only from them I can draw that strength and vigour, of which I stand in need. If we neglect the use of those powerful weapons, which are put into our hands, our salvation must necessarily be in danger. Yet that generally is the case. We put off from day to day, from month to month; after delaying some time, we wish to delay still longer, and at length can hardly take the resolution of going to the sacraments at all. In the meanwhile we experience the too fatal effects of our neglect, and being deprived of the heavenly succour, that was offered us, the force of our natural weakness becomes prevalent, and hurries us to our ruin. Fervour and

watchfulness relent, our vicious inclinations gain new strength, and if an unfortunate occasion is presented, we sink into the deep abyss, perhaps never more to rise from it. O my soul, fly thou no more from the sources of thy salvation, lest God withdraw from thee the helps he had prepared for thee, and thou fall naked and defenceless into the hands of thy enemies, who have conspired thy ruin. Feed on the bread of life, even the bread of angels, that thou mayest live with God for eternity.

7thly. A seventh means, which has ever been the secure shelter, and protection of all the Saints and Just in the church of God, is devotion to the Virgin Mary. O my soul, knowing the special favour and grace, which that *Blessed among women* (Luke i. 28.) enjoys with God, how canst thou fail of putting an almost unlimited confidence in her protection? What is there, that her prayers cannot obtain of her divine Son, and what salutary effects hast not thou thyself often experienced from her intercession? But if ever thou hadst need of calling upon her, can it at any time be more necessary, than to secure to thyself thy final perseverance? What thy own deserts cannot obtain, may be granted thee through her mediation. The prayers of that special favourite of heaven will be received in thy behalf, as were the prayers of the ancient Patriarchs in behalf of their brethren the children of Israel. Stretch forth therefore thy hands to her, and, uniting thy voice with hers, jointly entreat the Father of mercy to grant thee, for her sake, the grace of perseverance, of which thou thyself art undeserving.

THE COLLOQUY.

Merciful and gracious Lord, look down on that sacred Virgin, whom thou deignedst to choose for thy Mother, and in consideration of her superior prerogatives and transcendent virtues, grant me the most precious of all graces, the grace of final perseverance. Remember, O bountiful Saviour, that no one ever called upon thee in her name, and was rejected by thee. Thou never hast abandoned any of those, who under her protection and patronage presented their

fervent petition at thy throne. If her voice has always been prevalent in obtaining other favours, shalt thou be deaf to her petition, when she asks for me the most necessary of all things, *viz.* an inviolable perseverance in thy service to the end of my life? All other graces without this would avail me little, and thy power and liberality would in some manner appear less, if the favourite of thy heart should ask in vain for what must necessarily redound to thy honour and glory. Grant me therefore through her intercession this greatest of favours, which will crown all the other graces thou hast bountifully bestowed upon me.

A CONSIDERATION.

ON THE DIFFERENT STATES OF SOULS IN A SPIRITUAL LIFE.

The spirit breatheth where he will; and thou hearest his voice, but thou knowest not whence he cometh, or whither he goeth: so is every one, that is born of the spirit.—John iii. 8.

In an interior life there are times of comforts and times of trial. God sometimes leads souls to Thabor, sometimes to Calvary. In the order of grace, as well as in that of nature, there are calms and tempests, serene days and gloomy nights; that is, God sometimes visits souls with spiritual comfort and sweetness, sometimes he afflicts them with desolation. It is of extreme importance to know how to conduct ourselves in these different occasions, in order to correspond to the views of God, and not frustrate the works of the Holy Ghost.

We must inquire what is to be done in the time of spiritual sweetness and consolation; what is to be done under difficulties and trials; and what truth is to be gathered both from one and the other.

1st Point. In the days of peace and serenity, when the sun of justice shines in all its brilliancy, and sheds its benign influence on our souls, what are the particular duties demanded of us? we relish an interior sweetness in our prayers, in our communions, and other spiritual exercises; all seems zeal and warmth, comfort and delights; and being transported with divine love, we cry in raptures, with the Prince of the Apostles, when

ne beheld the glory of his Divine Master on Mount Thabor; *Lord, it is good for us to be here.* Matt. xvii. 4.

But the personal delight of the soul not being the primary intent of God in these visits, it is incumbent on us to examine to what end they are directed by God, what use we make of them through our own fidelity, and what they may become for want of our correspondence.

1st. What God proposes to himself in these supernatural visits is, his own glory, together with the soul's salvation. He intends to impart to us an idea of his own greatness, and magnificence of his bounty and other adorable perfections, thereby to draw us to love of himself. He makes use of the charms of his gifts, and the unction of his holy grace, to engage us in his service, and settle us in the steady practice of good.

Perhaps he intends to prepare us for some great trial and humiliation; to arm us for battle and strengthen us against the enemy, who is coming upon us. These times are like the years of plenty in Egypt, after which a dreadful famine will ensue. So far therefore from sleeping in this calm we must keep ourselves in readiness; we must prepare for the conflict, and dispose ourselves to bear the trials, which shall be sent us.

2dly. During these supernatural visits, fidelity requires on our side, that we should return our sincere thanks and acknowledgment to God, that we should nourish within us sentiments of diffidence and humility, and watch narrowly to all the motions and dispositions of our hearts. These moments are, as it were, a time of a harvest and gathering against the days of indigence and want.

Let us set before our eyes the melancholy example of the foolish Virgins in the gospel, who for want of watching were surprised at the coming of the bridegroom, and excluded from the feast, that had been prepared for them.

3dly. Through a want of correspondence on our side, these days of spiritual comfort and delight may produce the most pernicious consequences. However holy and precious such visits are in themselves, and however salutary according to the designs of God, yet

if we fail of making a due use of them, they will only engender illusion and temptation, pride and self-love and bring us to the very brink of destruction.

We must recollect, that the angel of darkness can *transform himself into an angel of light*, (2 Cor. xi. 14.) and that every spirit is not the spirit of God. Christians must be greatly on their guard at these times not to form extraordinary resolutions, nor engage in projects that may be of consequence. They may easily take improper steps, follow the shadow for the reality, and enter on by-paths, which will lead them astray. Prudence requires, that they do nothing of themselves and without advice, but that they proceed discreetly and naturally in all things. Many have lost their road by presuming too much on themselves, and relying too confidently on their present dispositions.

Besides illusion we may be liable to temptation. The devil finding us lessen our guard, will easily avail himself of our negligence to take us unawares: in an unlucky moment he perhaps will drive us so far astray, that we shall not recover ourselves for many years; one unfortunate stroke may inflict such desperate wounds, that after enjoying a few moments of deceitful comfort, we shall be reduced to shed bitter tears perhaps all our life.

Finally, those spiritual comforts are frequently a source of vanity and pride. Souls taking a complacency in their condition, feed their self-love with the sight of the graces, which are given them by the Holy Ghost for other purposes, and attribute to themselves the pure gratuitous gifts of God. We may compare them to a bride, who being endowed by her bridegroom with many jewels and valuable ornaments, embellishes herself with them, in order to captivate the heart of other persons, and to draw upon herself the attention and admiration of the world. If she is not absolutely unfaithful, at least she plainly discovers her want of regard and gratitude for her benefactor. By similar dispositions a soul is evidently in the utmost danger, and walks on the very brink of its ruin. We ought to attend diligently to the advice of the Holy

Ghost, and frequently repeat the important lesson to ourselves: *Let him, that thinks himself to stand, take heed, lest he fall.* 1 Cor. x. 12.

In order, therefore, to prevent such misfortunes, and answer the designs of God: 1st. We must humble ourselves in his presence, and absolutely believe, that we are unworthy of his sacred gifts. If God favours us with his spiritual delights, it is a pure effect of his goodness in order to support us in our weakness, and prevent us from sinking under the weight of it. We must moreover take prudent advice, which, in such occasions, is indispensably necessary.

2dly. We must be careful not to be too much wedded in these gifts of God, nor take too great delight and complacency in them. Our duty is to refer all to God, as the principle end of them; to look upon ourselves as mere trustees, being answerable for the good use of the graces bestowed on us, and endeavouring to advance carefully in the paths of virtue by help of the light that shines upon us, lest darkness should soon succeed in its stead.

3dly. In the days of consolation we must believe that the time of our enjoyment cannot be long, but that our comforts will soon be changed into dryness and aridity. After light comes darkness, serenity is followed by clouds, and to calm succeed storms and tempests. We must prepare therefore for the change, or rather always live in readiness for it, knowing that our *adversary the devil, as a roaring lion,* always *goeth about seeking whom* of us *he may devour.* 1 Peter. v. 8.—Let us make our provision in the season of plenty, and not squander away the riches which God put in our hands.

On the other hand, we must not run into an opposite extreme, and through a spirit of niggardliness and diffidence, hoard up, as it were, the gifts of God, without daring to make use of them. The manna that fell from heaven, if kept only to the following day, degenerated into corruption. We are not to feed and cherish ourselves with the consideration of the favours we receive from God, but to avail ourselves of them to increase in humility and watchfulness, in resignation and

perfect conformity to the divine pleasure: as, in proportion to our gratitude, God will daily be more liberal to us.

2d Point. As we sometimes meet with comfort in the service of God, so at other times we must expect conflicts and trials. The days of consolation are over, prayer and conversation with God have no longer the charms they used to have; the source of heavenly communications seem to be entirely dried up. Storms and tempests gather round us, and temptations crowd in on all sides, to assault and overwhelm us.

At this sight a soul, which has been accustomed to feed on heavenly delights, is disquieted and alarmed; it believes that all is lost, and seeing itself, as it were, abandoned in the midst of a tempestuous ocean, it cries out in consternation to God: *Lord, save us, we perish.* Matthew viii. 25.—Happy, if remembering that its salvation must come from God, it shall continue to call earnestly upon him, in lieu of yielding to its fears, and sinking under the oppression of its terrors.

What God intends on these occasions is to try and purify souls, to give strength and consistency to their virtue, perhaps to punish them for former neglects, or to prepare them for humiliation for some new grace and favour, which he destines for them. It is our duty to adore the designs of God, and correspond with them, particularly as they can only tend to our happiness.

1st. God intends to try us, or, to speak more properly, he intends to let us see what we are. Often at the foot of his altar we made our earnest protestations of fidelity to him, and and in the height of our fervour thought ourselves capable of undertaking the greatest things for his service. He will let us see, whether the effects will correspond to our words, and whether it was the mouth or the heart, that spoke to him. Before the day of trial Peter was a generous follower of Jesus Christ; he was no sooner attacked, than he fell, though afterwards he had the happiness to wash away his infidelity with his tears.

2dly. The second intent of God is to purify us by means of these trials. However holy a soul is, it always experiences some weakness in itself; the most

perfect are always liable to many imperfections. We are frequently inattentive to, or positively resist the calls of grace: we acquit ourselves with sloth of the service of God; our duties are performed in a tepid and negligent manner. Now God intends, that these, and numberless other faults, we are guilty of, shall be expiated by the trials, and interior sufferings, which he sends us. He ordains sufferings to satisfy for and efface the blemishes, with which we are defiled. As gold is purified in the fire, so souls are cleansed from their imperfections by the fire of tribulation; which restores to them their primitive splendour and beauty.

3dly. A third view of God in sending us sufferings, is to give strength and consistency to our virtue. A tree, that is planted in a fertile soil on an eminence, is exposed to be torn and shaken by the winds; but if it resists the force of tempests, it will gain strength, and take deeper root. Such is the effect of trials in regard to a virtuous soul. Being planted in rich ground, and raised to a particular eminence in the order of grace, it gains strength and vigour by means of interior trials; either because God gives it more grace at those times, or that it keeps a greater guard and watch over itself, and exerts more vigorous efforts in resisting the attacks of its enemy, who is labouring to overwhelm it. *I take pleasure in my infirmities*, said St. Paul. *For when I am weak, then am I powerful:* 2 Cor. xii. 10.—the reason whereof is, because when we have an experimental feeling of our own weakness, we are forced to have recourse to God, and what may we not effect through the help of grace?

4thly. Sometimes the design of God in these trials is to prepare souls for some signal favour and extraordinary grace, which he has destined for them. He begins therefore by sinking a deep foundation of humility, upon which the edifice of their perfection is to be raised.

But whatever the particular views of God may be, they are always the gracious effects of his bountiful Providence, tending to our salvation, and the increase of our virtue. But in lieu of corresponding to these designs, and seeking our own welfare and happiness

in them, we unfortunately often grow disquieted and uneasy under the trial, we give ourselves up to diffidence and dejection, and perhaps break out into open murmurings and complaints.

This is but too frequently the case. As long as we find ourselves supported by sensible delights and consolations, and as long as the sweetness of divine grace is felt in our hearts, so long are we contented with the service of God, and comply faithfully with our duties to him.

But from the moment that the clouds of tribulation seem to overcast the sun of Divine Justice, and eclipse its radiency from our eyes, our hearts fail us, our fainting souls are no longer capable of undertaking any thing for the service of God, we fly back at the sight of pretended dangers and hardships, and are on the very point of entirely abandoning all our duties to God. Prayer becomes disgustful, our communions are less frequent, our exercises of devotion are either wholly laid aside, or performed in a superficial manner; in a word, ruin and destruction stand at our very door.

To reap the fruit, which God intends we should, from these trials, we ought to adopt the following rules, which we may adhere to through the grace of God; that grace, which is promised us at all times, but more particularly in the time of tribulation.

1st. Let us humbly acknowledge in the sight of God, that we are deserving of the sufferings which he sends us, and that we have drawn them upon ourselves by our sins: *I have sinned against heaven.* Luke xv. 18.—2dly. Let us address God in earnest prayer to assist us, and fervently implore his particular guidance and support in our sufferings: *Thou art my helper, and my protector: O, my God, be not slack.* Psalm xxxix. 18. 3dly. We should put a particular trust and confidence in God, believing that he is much nearer to us, than he appears to be. The saints often thought that they were abandoned by God, but experience taught them in the end, that he had not forsaken them, seeing that without his assistance they could not have vanquished their temptations.

4thly. The fourth rule should be to be more steady in our practices of piety and devotion than we hereto-

fore were, and even to redouble our diligence, rather than relent from it. That soldier never could conquer, who should throw away his arms in time of battle.

Above all, in these days of trial, dryness, dereliction, we must unite ourselves to our suffering Saviour on the Cross, who being forsaken by his Eternal Father in his passion, yet offered up his torments for the sins of men, and in particular, to merit graces and help for those, who should suffer tribulation and afflictions like himself.

Finally, in the times of darkness and aridity, we must hope for better days; God has ordained a succession of different events throughout the whole course of nature. After the horrors of the battle are over, we shall better relish the sweets of peace.

Thus all the saints were tried by sufferings; they walked in paths strewed with thorns, often watered with their tears, and sometimes even sprinkled with their own blood. Before we arrive at the land of promise, we must pass through the desert.

If it be asked which of the two states, that of consolation or aridity, is most conducive to the welfare of souls, the answer is general, that the state which God sends, provided a due use be made of it, is always best. But what also may be added is, that the time of trial is less exposed to danger, and affords more opportunities of merit, and the time of consolation is less meritorious, and more exposed to danger.

To conclude, let us abandon ourselves unreservedly into the hands of God, let us accept of whatever he sends, and endeavour to make a holy use of all that he permits. If he visits us with consolation, we must receive it with gratitude; if he presents us with the bitter chalice of sufferings, we must take it from his hands with due submission. Fidelity to grace and conformity to the divine decrees will lead us securely to the term of our happiness. God knows the road, in which it is best for us to walk; it is our duty to follow it: if it is painful and laborious, we shall be indemnified for all our trouble in the end.

END.

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